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THE SILENT RIFLEMAN.

A TALE OF THE TEXAN PLAINS.

BY HENRY W. HERBERT.



THE RIDER STRAINED HIS EYES SOMEWHAT ANXIALLY AS THE DAY WORE ON TOWARD ITS CLOSE.

The Silent Rifleman.

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CHAPTER I.

THE HORSE AND THE RIDER.

It wanted an hour or two of sunset on a lovely evening in the latter part of September, when a single horseman might have been seen, making his way to the westward, across the high dry prairie land, which lies between the upper portion of the river Nueces and the Bravo del Norte.

He was a small, spare man, of no great personal power, but of a figure which gave promise of great agility and capability of enduring fatigue, the most remarkable feature of which was the extraordinary length of his arms.

His countenance, without being in the least degree handsome, was pleasing and expressive, with a broad and massive forehead, a quick, clear, black eye, a firm, well-cut mouth, and a character of great acuteness, combined with indomitable resolution.

His dress consisted of an Indian hunting-shirt and leggings of buckskin, exquisitely dressed, and adorned with much fringe and embroidery of porcupine quills, wrought in black upon a claret-colored ground. His head was covered by a high-crowned broad-leaved hat of dark gray felt, with some heavy silver ornaments in the band, and his feet were protected by stout Indian moccasins.

In the wilderness, and on that frontier especially, all men go armed, the traveler depending on his weapons not only for the defense, but the subsistence of his life; but the person I have described was loaded with offensive arms to a degree unusual even in that land of perilous and cruel warfare.

A short, heavy English rifle, carrying a ball of twelve to the pound, was slung by a black leather belt across his shoulders, the braided strap which supported his large buffalo-horn powder flask and bullet pouch of otter skin crossing it on his breast. From a leather girdle, which was buckled about his waist, he had hung a long, straight, two-edged sword in a steel scabbard with a silver basket hilt on the left side, which was counterbalanced by a long, broad-bladed hunting knife with a buck-horn hilt, resting upon his right hip. There were holsters at the bow of his large Mexican saddle, containing a pair of fine dueling pistols with ten-inch barrels; and in addition to these, there was suspended from the pommel a formidable hatchet with a bright steel head and a spike at the back, like an Indian tomahawk, but in all respects a more ponderous and superior instrument.

On the croup of his horse, and attached to the cantle of the saddle, he carried a small valise of untanned leather, with a superb Mexican blanket of blue and scarlet strapped upon it, and a large leathern bottle with a horn drinking-cup swinging from it on one side; while to the other was fastened a portion of the loin of a fat buck, which had fallen in the course of the morning by the rifle of the traveler.

The horse which carried this well-appointed rider was a dark-brown thoroughbred of great power and action, at least sixteen hands in height, and apparently, though somewhat low in flesh, in the finest possible condition. He was perhaps what might be termed an English cross-bred, but his quarters and arm were superb and his deep, roomy chest showed ample space for that breathing apparatus, so essential to speed and endurance. He had one white foot behind, and a broad white blaze on his face, across which there was a large seam, evidently the scar of a long and severe broad-sword cut; in his fore-shoulder there was another mark as of a stab with a lance or bayonet, and on his left quarter the traces of three bullets or grape shot.

None of these wounds had, however, impaired either his strength or his speed; nor had the long day's journey, which he had performed, diminished the pride of his high slashing action, or quenched in the least degree the wild and fiery light of his untamed eye.

Nothing, in fact, could be more perfect than the whole air and appearance of both horse and rider. Though care and grooming were manifest in the condition and coat of the noble animal, the arms and accoutrements of the man were as bright and clean as if they had just issued from the armory; his dress was accurately neat and in perfect order, and was worn with a sort of jaunty smartness that bespoke the wearer something of a frontier dandy. His hair, which he wore long, was nicely arranged and hung in dark curls over his gay-colored neckerchief; and his close curled beard had been trimmed recently, and by a practiced hand.

His seat in the saddle was the perfection of grace, ease and neatness; yet it was evident that in spite of the almost careless freedom of his limbs, he rode with as much power as grace,

and that there was a world of strength in the swelling muscles of the thigh and leg which rested so lightly on the embossed and ornamented saddle.

The finger, which played continually with the long-checked, heavy curb on his charger, was as light and delicate as a feather; and the manner in which the animal champed on the solid part, tossing his head, and making the bits ring and jingle merrily, showed that he had a fine light mouth, and that he felt no inconvenience from the powerful bridle.

As the day wore on toward its close, the rider began to strain his eyes somewhat anxiously, directing them forward as if in search of some object which he greatly desired to see; but still as he crossed swell after swell of the high and prairie land, nothing met his gaze but one low ridge succeeding another, rising up bare and bleak, covered only with long coarse grass withered beneath the fierce rays of an American sun, and interspersed here and there with tufts and thickets of prickly pear and other stunted thorny bushes.

There were no symptoms of verdure or rich vegetation on this arid and barren tract; no traces of any water whether in the shape of streamlet, pool or fountain; all was dry, burned and yellow, almost as the scorched sands of the Arabian desert.

Neither were there any signs of animal life in this ungenial and treeless waste; no birds sprung up from the thick grass before the feet of the gallant horse; no deer or antelope was seen bounding away across the sky-line of the near horizon; no hum of insect life reached the ear of the rider, as he passed steadily and rapidly onward.

At length, when the sun was no longer above three times the width of his own disk from the level line of the lowest plain, he set his spurs to his horse, and put him from the high slashing trot which he had hitherto maintained, into a long slinging gallop, which carried him over the ground at the rate of some sixteen miles the hour.

After he had ridden at this rate for thirty or forty minutes, he reached the brow of one of the low rolling waves of earth, which constitute the surface of the prairie, and thence saw the land falling away in a long gentle slope for some six miles toward the west, at which distance it was bounded by a long continuous line of hills whose range seemed interminable. At the base of this range appeared a dense line, looking somber enough at that distance, but which the experienced eye of the horseman well knew indicated a heavy growth of timber—perhaps a deep forest, and within its shadowy depths, a wide and never-failing stream.

An exclamation of pleasure broke from the lips of the rider, spoken in American but with a strong foreign accent. The hard-ridden horse tossed his head and snuffed the air with his broad distended nostrils as if he inhaled the pleasant freshness of the stream and the sweet grasses there. They did not, however, relax their speed in consequence of the pleasure arising from that long desired view: but, if any thing hastened more swiftly forward to the spot which promised to both horse and rider repose and refreshment after the toils of the long and weary day.

A short half-hour brought them to the forest just as the sun was setting; and nothing can be conceived in nature more lovely than the scenery of that green wilderness. For about a mile in width, on either side of the grand, majestic river, the earth was covered with the freshest and richest greensward, as tender in its hues, and as soft and elastic to the foot as the finest English lawn. The whole of this vast meadow was thickly set with gigantic trees; live-oaks with their deep evergreen foliage, and oaks of every species, grown to a size of trunk and spread of limb which we can barely conceive, accustomed as we are to the less luxuriant vegetation of the Northern forests. For the most part, this belt of noble timber was completely free from underwood, the trees standing so far apart as to admit the maneuvering of a regiment of horse between their huge and massy boles; but in some places there were dense thickets of bay, wild peach and holly, all matted and intertwined with enormous vines and creepers of every description, so as to defy the entrance of any intruder larger than a rabbit or a rat into their green recesses. And over all was spread the eternal canopy of fresh, dark foliage, perpetually renewed, and sheltering the moist soil beneath it with an unchanged vault of living greenery.

Through this wild paradise the mighty river rolled its pellucid waves, rapid, and deep and strong, and as transparent as the purest crystal.

Beautiful as was the picture in itself, its loveliness was yet enhanced a thousand-fold by the contrast it presented to the arid and burning plains, almost destitute of vegetation, over which the way of the traveler had lain, and the almost intolerable glare with which the unclouded sun had scourged the head of both horse and rider during the live-long day.

Galloping his horse joyously over the rich green turf, the traveler soon reached the river, at a spot where it was bordered by a little

beach or margin of pure white sand, as firm, and almost as hard as marble; and springing into the cool clear water till it laved the heaving flanks of his charger he suffered it to drink long and deep of the pure beverage, which had not touched its thirsty lips since the early morning.

This duty done he returned to the shore, and, selecting an oak tree about two feet in girth, around which the grass grew unusually tall and luxuriant, tied his companion to its stem by the lasso, or cord of plaited hide which was coiled at his saddle-bow, allowing him a range of some twenty yards in circumference, removed the heavy bit and ponderous saddle, and, not till then, applied himself to satisfy the urgency of his own thirst with water from the river, slightly mingled with the contents of the good leathern bottle.

Having drank freely, he again returned to the care of his horse, which he rubbed down carefully, washing its eyes and nostrils, pulling its ears, chafing its clean bony legs till they were perfectly free from moisture, whether of sweat or of the river water which had bathed them so recently.

Then, after polishing his accoutrements, as if for parade, he hung his rifle and his broadsword from the fork of a stunted oak tree, collecting some dry leaves and branches, and, striking a light from the ready flint and steel, soon had a clear bright fire glancing and flashing in a sheltered nook surrounded on all sides but one, that where his horse was tethered, by a dense and impenetrable thicket of bays, prickly pear and holly.

Within a few minutes half a dozen twigs, fixed in the ground about the blazing fire, supported as many steaks of fat venison, each with a biscuit under it imbibing the delicious gravy, and a second with salt and pepper, all which unusual dainties were supplied from the small valise of the provident and epicurean frontiersman.

While his supper was cooking thus, and sending forth rich and unwonted odors through the forest, our traveler had prepared his simple couch, spreading his handsome poncho on the deep herbage, with his saddle arranged for his pillow, immediately under the tree from which he had suspended his gun and saber—his pistols, the locks and copper caps of which he carefully inspected, his tomahawk being laid ready to his hand beside it—his good knife never left his girdle—so that if aroused from his slumbers by any sound of peril, he might spring to his feet armed at once, and prepared for any fortune.

All the precautions which he took were but the ordinary accidents, as a painter would term them, of the life of a frontiersman; but the nicety of his arrangements, the neatness of his dress, the extreme pains which he took with his horse and arms, and above all the unusual fare, the biscuits and condiments, the leathern bottle, filled not with rum or whisky, but with fine Xeres wine, betokened tastes and habitudes more cultivated, perhaps manners more refined, than would be ordinarily expected from the rover of the Texan wilderness.

To render it, however, more apparent than this that our traveler's condition in life and his acquirements were superior to the opinion men would naturally form from his dress, and from the place in which we find him, as he cast himself down on the soft greensward near the fire, and ran his fingers through the long rich curls from which he had removed his hat, he began to hum an air from a favorite opera, while he inspected with a curious eye the approaching end of his culinary preparations.

If, however, he had hoped to enjoy his coming meal and his night's repose without interruption, he had reckoned without his host; for, at the same instant in which his charger ceased from feeding, snuffed the air eagerly, and uttered a low whining, the traveler started to his feet and listened anxiously for a moment, although there were no sounds which could have been distinguished by any human ear unsharpened by the necessities and habits of a woodman's life.

Satisfied apparently that something was at hand which might mean mischief, he quietly took up his pistols and thrust them into his girdle, reached down his rifle from the branch on which it hung, loosened his wood-knife in its scabbard, and passed the handle of his hatchet through a loop in his sword-belt, so that the head rested in a sort of fold or pocket in the leather, evidently prepared for its reception, and the haft lay close on his left thigh.

The broadsword he entirely neglected, as a weapon of no utility in the struggle which he expected, one, perhaps, which he bore only as a horseman's arm, and which might be held to imply that he acted at times in company with others, and those disciplined horsemen.

These preparations made, silently, promptly, yet deliberately, he stooped and laid his ear to the ground; nor did he raise himself to his full height for several minutes.

"Two, four, six, eight," he muttered to himself at intervals. "Yes, there are eight of them! By Heaven! it is too great odds; yet I had faint halt here, for Emperor has had a hard day of it"—he paused a moment, as if in doubt, then quickly replaced his bite in the charger's

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mouth, and the saddle on his back, and hung his broadsword and blanket on the pommel; but he did not unfasten the lasso, nor did his compressed lip, flashing eye and curled nostril show any disposition to abandon his position and his supper.

Again he laid his ear to the ground and listened.

"Yes, there are eight of them, sure enough," he again muttered; and then, after a pause, he added: "but two of them are mules, I think; and they are coming right down hitherward."

Then he looked to his rifle lock and cocked his piece.

"Unless they turn aside when they reach the timber, they will be on me in five minutes; and if they know the forest, they will not turn, that's certain; for here's the only place where you can find hard bottom to ride in and out of the old Bravo, for ten miles up and down."

He paused from his soliloquy, listened again, and then a smile crept across his intelligent face. "Bah!" he said, "I have disquieted myself for nothing—they are dragoon horses; I can tell their managed pace; though, what the devil brings dragoons hither, the devil himself best knows."

Then he hung up his arms as before, again removed saddle and bridle from his horse, threw down his pistols and his hatchet on the grass, and, instead of concealing himself in ambush, marmal, except his wood-knife, stepped quite at his ease forth from the covert of his thicket, and strode boldly forward to meet the new-comers.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT BIVOUAC.

GREAT as was the surprise of the frontiersman at discovering by the keenness of his ear—and that peculiar sagacity, half reasoning, half instinctive, by which men, living in what may be called a half-savage state of life, jump at once to what others would necessarily deem most unforeseen conclusions—that the approaching party consisted of dragoons, far greater was his wonder when he saw precisely of whom that party was composed.

He had not advanced above a hundred yards from the spot where his horse was tethered and his fire burning, before he discovered the little band of travelers just entering the belt of timber, not above a hundred yards' distance from the point where he himself had ridden into it from the open prairie.

They consisted, as he had instantly discovered by the niceness of his ear, of eight animals, six of which were mounted, the other two being beasts of burden. This, in itself, was a singular arrangement for men traveling through a perilous and hostile wilderness, where celerity of progress is the object to be attained, far more than comfort or convenience, and where, for the most part, men rely for their subsistence on their rifles and ammunition, and for their personal comforts on the smallest possible knapsack or valise.

That, however, which instantly caught the eye of the rover was the form of a female—and a female, evidently, of the superior classes, forming one of the party, which, beside herself, consisted, as he saw at half a glance, of an officer and four privates of dragoons, or mounted riflemen. All this the woodman had discovered long before he was himself descried by the soldiers, who rode on, one private thrown forward in advance of the lady and the officer, who rode abreast, with his rifle or carbine slung and ready for service, two others following, each leading a heavily-laden pack-mule, and the last bringing up the rear, with his weapon likewise in his hand—all seemingly unconscious that they were in the neighborhood of any human being.

This, in itself, was little calculated to impress the woodman with any great respect for the soldierly qualities, much less for the woodcraft, of the new-comers; and perhaps, it was from a desire to examine into these a little more closely, that he drew himself somewhat aside from the direction of their advance, and concealed himself behind the stem of a huge live oak.

"Precious lads, truly, these," he muttered through his teeth, "to be traveling the prairies, and not see my trail at a short hundred yards. By the Lord! I believe they will cross it without notice."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the line, in which the party was advancing, would evidently intersect the track which his own horse had made through the deep herbage and soft soil of the grassy meadow, from the surface of which the great timber-trees shot up so massive and luxuriant.

Now they were within ten yards of it, yet the vedette, or scout, in advance, had evidently taken no note of it. But at this moment when our traveler was beginning to laugh in silent scorn at the proceedings of the soldiers, whom he evidently regarded as little or nothing worth, the party came to a sudden halt; not in consequence of any alarm communicated by the trooper in advance, but at a word passed onward to the head of the little column from him who brought up the rear, and who now cantered forward, and saluted as he addressed his officer,

pointing to the broken grass and trampled soil, indicating the passage of some heavy animal at less than thirty yards distance on their left flank, from which, when he noticed it, he was the furthest distant of the whole party.

The officer in command immediately rode on, and after inspecting the trail rather narrowly, and having, it would seem, satisfied himself of its nature, drew his party a little more closely together, and caused all his men to unsling and prepare their rifles. Then altering his course, which would have intersected the track near by the frontiersman, he followed it directly downward, toward where his horse was standing.

"Ha! he has seen the shodden hoof," muttered the woodsman to himself, "and so feels secure that it is not a Comanche who has preceded him. A poor criterion, too, when the whooping devils have stolen so many of our troop horses in the last three months. Besides, what tells him it is not a Mexican ranchero who has passed, and may be leading him into an ambush? He might see that, it is true, by the size and roundness of the track; it is not every mustang or Spanish horse sets down such a foot as Emperor. Now, if I had my rifle and my bull-dogs with me, how I could pick off that lieutenant and two out of his four fellows, before they should know what hurt them. By heaven! if they show no more wit than this after they get into the Spanish country fairly, they will scarce reach Old Zachary with whole skins. I' faith, I'm glad, for the girl's sake, I fell in with them, though what in the devil's name they should be bringing a girl out here into the wilderness for is more than I can guess. Well, well, that's no affair of mine—but I'll give them a fright anyhow—so here goes," and with the words, he clapped his hand to his mouth, and uttered a long-drawn Indian yell, which made the arches of the forest echo and re-echo its cadences, till it died quavering in the far distance.

The rifles of the little party were cocked in an instant, and two or three were instinctively cast up, and leveled in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

But the woodman did not wait for any further demonstrations of hostility, but stepped calmly forth from his covert, calling out, as he did so, in a loud, clear voice:

"Whither, and whence, friends, so carelessly this bright evening?"

But ere his words were half out of his lips, he was interrupted by the sharp crack of a rifle, discharged at him within twenty paces, the ball of which sung past his head, perhaps at a foot's distance. But, entirely unmoved by the assault or by the peril he had run, he finished his sentence quietly, and then added:

"A miserable bad shot, that, my lad, and a most unsoldierly act to fire a shot at all, without waiting orders. Do not you say so, lieutenant?"

But before he had spoke, the officer had opened his mouth to reprimand the unlucky dragoon, who was in fact no other than the vedette, who had so stupidly overlooked the track on entering the timber, and he continued to do so sharply, sending the man to the rear, and ordering him to relieve one of the soldiers who led the pack mules, before he gave any attention to the stranger.

That done, however, without replying to his question, he said quickly:

"You are very much to blame yourself, fellow; first, for yelling in that wild fashion, as if for the very purpose of creating an alarm, and then for approaching a command so rashly. Who are you, fellow, speak?"

"Fellow! fellow!" replied the other, half soliloquizing, "and a command, hey! command, truly; a couple of commands, or one of Jack Hays's men would make an end of such a command, before it had seen where to throw away one bullet. So you desire to know who I am, lieutenant. Now, it is usual in the prairie, or the timber, for the stronger party to answer such questions first; but, in the first place, as I know very well who you are, and in the second, as I am not at all clear that you are the stronger, I have not so much objection to divulge."

He spoke so well and correctly, and his manner was so gentlemanlike, though he uttered his words with something of a bantering expression, and a half contemptuous smile, that the young dragoon officer perceived at once that he had mistaken his man in a degree; and his tone was altered, as he again addressed him.

"Well, sir, and who are you, then, I pray?"

"Pierre Delacroix, at your service."

"What! he who is commonly known as Pierre—"

"The Partisan, lieutenant," interrupted the other, quietly. "Yes, I am the man, and my horse, Emperor, of whom you have heard, since you have heard of me, is down in the brake yonder; and, what is a better thing just now, there is a good fire burning, and some venison steaks ready by this time, if they be not overdone, and a flask of good sherry wine and some cool water; and if you and your fair lady will share the supper of the Partisan, I shall be happy to think that I am pardoned for the slight alarm I gave you; and after supper, we will hear what has brought you hither, and what I can do to serve you. Is it a bargain?"

"Surely it is; and very thankful shall we be

for your hospitality, and yet more for your advice. This is the famous soldier, Julia," he continued, turning to the lady who accompanied him, "of whom you have heard so much, and whom we had hoped to meet at San Antonio. It is most fortunate that we should have so unexpectedly fallen in with you, at a moment when we were indeed in no small perplexity as to our next movement."

"We will speak of this further at the camp," replied the Partisan—for such was the name in which he especially rejoiced—bowing deeply to the lady with the manners of one used to the society of courts, no less than of camps; "for it is growing late, and it will be quite dark in a few minutes. Allow me to show you the nearest way. You will find but poor accommodation, lady; yet, poor as it is, it is better than mere frontier fare."

No more words were spoken until they reached the spot which Delacroix had selected for his bivouac; but, as they did so, an exclamation of pleasure burst from Julia's lips at the romantic beauty of the scene.

The watch-fire of the Partisan, which had by this time burnt up bright and clear, was casting a wide ruddy light over the rich greenward and dark foliage overhead, glancing upon the arms and accoutrements which hung or lay around it dwelling wanly on the rich hues of the Spanish blanket which was spread on the ground—a fit cover for a soldier. At a little distance, the twilight shadows dwelt so deeply in the long arcades of the forest, that nothing could be seen except in the direction of the broad and majestic river, on the bosom of which all the light of the skies appeared to be concentrated.

"How beautiful!" she cried, in those soft, low silvery tones which are so exquisite a thing in woman. "How beautiful! and, what is more, at such a moment, how bright and cheerful-looking! Why, Mr. Delacroix, instead of the wild, desperate chieftain I expected to find in you," she continued, turning gayly toward the Partisan, "you must have the eye of a painter, and the imagination of a poet."

"Spare me, I pray you, madame," answered Pierre, with a low, merry laugh. "Should Jack Hays or McCulloch hear what you say, I should lose caste and character directly, and forever. And yet," he added, with a half sigh, "I believe it is this touch of romance—which finds its way, more or less, into every heart, except that which beats within the sordid breast of the trader—that makes the joys—nay, the very perils of a forest life dearer to thousands such as I, than all the charms of civilized society, which some of us—though you would hardly fancy it—have tasted. But, come, let me help you from your horse, of which, by the distance you have traveled, I should suppose you must be more than a little weary. Look to your men, lieutenant, and I will do the honors to your fair lady."

And, with the words, he extended his arms, as if he would have lifted her from the saddle; but she replied by a merry ringing laugh—one of those fresh, artless, genuine laughs, which can proceed only from the lips of a young, mirthful, unsophisticated woman—and patting the arched neck of the beautiful thoroughbred mare which carried her:

"Oh, no!" she cried; "if you will not allow me to disparage your character, by attributing a little dash of poetry to you, I must not let you fancy me so very unfit for a soldier's wife as to be tired with a little ride of thirty miles. Besides," she added, again caressing her favorite, "Nell goes more like a bird through the air than a more earthly wingless Pegasus. Oh, no, I can dismount unaided."

And, extricating her knee gracefully from the pommel of her side-saddle, she gathered the long draperies of her dark cloth riding-habit, and sprung lightly to the ground; but she had either miscalculated her strength, or she tripped as she touched the earth, for she would surely have fallen headlong, had not the ready, stalwart arm of the Partisan caught her, instinctively, round the slender waist, and given her the support which she required, though she refused it.

"A thousand thanks!" she said, as she extricated herself, blushing slightly, from his half embrace. "I was both willful and awkward; and I believe I must confess to a little weariness also; but I am afraid I am a bit of a spoiled child as you may learn, to your cost, if we journey far in company, Major Delacroix—for I believe that is your correct designation."

The Partisan bowed, but made no answer; so thoroughly were all his senses engaged and absorbed in gazing on the face and form of unrivaled loveliness which now, for the first time, met his gaze; since the darkness of the increasing twilight, the lady's vail, and her seat on horseback, had prevented him from distinguishing clearly either her person or features.

But now, as she stood erect before him, with the clear light of the blazing wood-fire falling full on her face, and revealing all the charms of a figure, tall as the tallest of her sex, voluptuous and fully rounded, yet slight withal, and delicate and slender as the fairest ideal of a poet's dream, he thought that he had never

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looked upon anything so perfectly and femininely lovely.

Her face—of the exact oval, and strictly classic outline—possessed that innocence and almost infantile expression which painters have ascribed only to Madonna, and which is, perhaps, too purely beautiful and unearthly in its character to be very lovable, unless it be relieved, as it was in this sweet being, by an air of arch mirthfulness, and by something which seemed to indicate that there lay a world of passion sleeping beneath that placid and childlike exterior.

Her slightly arched eyebrows, and long-fringed eyelashes, were many shades darker than the redundant tresses of her rich silky hair, which was of the brightest and most golden auburn. Her eyes were of that languid sleepy blue, which is, perhaps, the rarest and loveliest of all colors; her complexion was the fairest and most delicate, and her mouth, which was certainly the most beautiful feature of her face, would have been almost sensual, but for that innocent and dove-like expression of the other features, and for the artless gayety which smiled from its dimples.

It is, perhaps, the hardest thing on earth to describe beauty; for in beauty there is something more than mere outline, than mere coloring; there is a spirit, a soul, an intangible and indescribable presence, which we feel rather than see; which dazzles the eye and dizzies the brain, while it entrails the heart; and which not the painter's pencil can altogether transfer to his glowing canvas, much less the pen call up to the eye of fancy. This, nevertheless, is the portraiture of a true and most lovely woman; and if it seem not so to the reader, let him be sure that the fault is in the artist, not the model; for Pierre Delacroix, though in his younger days he had seen many lovely women, now felt at once that he had never seen aught which could match this paragon—in truth, he had never loved till now, and now he loved madly, hopelessly, yet forever.

For some moments he stood gazing at her, mute and positively breathless with admiration; then, suddenly recollecting himself, and mastering his surprise and delight, though not without something of an effort, he called to the nearest of the dragoons, bidding him lead the lady's horse down to the river and water him; and then conducted her respectfully to the place where he had spread his poncho on the grass, and with the aid of that and his large saddle, arranged for her an extemporaneous arm-chair near the fire, which the fresh coolness of the wood rendered not wholly needless, even at that season; while the thin smoke that rose from the wood embers, kept the mosquitoes at a distance.

Meanwhile, some of the dragoons applied themselves to clean the horses and accoutrements, while others unloaded the pack mules, and unbuckling the bags and cases which they carried, produced camp-kettles and canteens, and a small India-rubber tent and camp-bed, which was speedily set up and prepared in the methodical manner of the old soldier, and promised better accommodation for the lady than she could well have looked for in the forest.

By this time the chargers were cleaned and tethered, two or three fires were lighted, and the camp-kettles were filled—one with the beef and pork, which compose the soldiers' rations, and another with coffee, while hastily kneaded cakes were baking in the embers.

The men having got through their labors, lay stretched around the fires, smoking or chatting over the adventures of the day; and the lieutenant who commanded them, having inspected everything and satisfied himself that all was safe for the night, strolled up to the quarters (if they may be so termed) of the Partisan, who was engaged when he came up, in serving his forest meal on plates and dishes—to him a long unknown luxury—borrowed from the dragoon a canteen, and mixing his sherry and water—to her as great a luxury—for his fair, unknown visitor.

"I could not join you sooner," said the young officer, as he came up, "for I could not leave the men. They are good fellows enough in barracks, or in the field with an enemy before them; but they are new hands at this bivouacking and catering for themselves and their horses, and would make but poor work of it if I were not forever at their heels."

"I do not doubt it," replied Delacroix, "or, I should rather say, I know it. A hundred of us woodmen would live on the fat of the land, with nothing but our rifles to depend on, where a score of your dragoons would starve, for all their pack mules and rations. You are poorly escorted, lady, for the wilderness."

"Oh! we have done vastly well thus far," she replied, gayly, "and I begin to look upon it all as a mere frolic; I heard so much of danger where I have not as yet met with privation, that I fancy all the dreaded stories I have heard were mere exaggerations."

"I trust they may all prove so in the end," said the Partisan rather gravely. "At all events, it shall not be my fault if they do not. But my cooking is ready, lady, such as it is,

and I fancy you have the Spartan sauce, which makes even the black broth palatable."

Julia started a little at the classical allusion, and cast a quick glance toward her young husband, whose attention had been fixed on another portion of the roving soldier's speech, and said, quickly, repeating the Partisan's word:

"Lady! Indeed I have been strangely remiss and discourteous, Major Delacroix. In the first hurry of our introduction I forgot to name ourselves to you, though Yankee like; yet, I assure you, I am not a Yankee; I by no means forgot to extort from you all that I wished to know. Not a very unpardonable thing that a soldier should be a little *gauche*, but very funny that a pretty lady should. I should have imagined, Jule, that you would have found tongue enough by this time to make yourself known to Major Delacroix, but, since it seems you have not done so, better late than never. Allow me, Major Delacroix, to present you to Mrs. Arthur Gordon, six weeks ago Miss Julia Forester, of New Orleans; and that done, to call your attention to my very humble and unworthy self, Arthur Gordon, First Lieutenant of the Second Dragoons."

He spoke gayly and merrily, but the Partisan seemed to hear no more after the first few words of the introduction were spoken; he had arisen to his feet, for he had been seated by the fire busied about his cookery, and bowed very gracefully at the first name; but when Arthur Gordon pronounced the words, Julia Forester, he started forward, and exclaimed:

"What—what! it cannot be—the daughter of my best and oldest friend, Colonel John Forester? I recollect his wife's name, whom I never saw, was Julia."

Julia Gordon blushed crimson, as he spoke, and then in an instant turned as pale as ashes.

"My mother!" she gasped out, with a great exertion of the will compelling herself to speak at all. "My poor mother, I never saw her either, at least not within my recollection. Yes, Major Delacroix, I am Col. John Forester's wild and willful daughter, God bless him," she continued, a big tear swelling to her eye, "as he deserves a better child."

"Not so, not so, young lady. I am certain that it is not so. A brighter or more beautiful, he could not have, and it will be hard to convince me he could have a better. Lieutenant Gordon, allow me to shake your hand, and congratulate you; your father-in-law, and your sweet lady's father, was, I may say, to me more than a father; for, when Nature robbed me of both my parents, he supplied both their places; he taught me all I know, and had I profited by his teachings, instead of being a wild, wandering Partisan, I might have been a scholar and a gentleman. Still there is something decent about Pierre Delacroix, after all, and that something is all good John Forester's. God bless John Forester, and all who love and honor him."

So thoroughly was the Partisan engrossed by his own warm and generous feelings, that he did not perceive at all, what would at any other time have been sufficiently apparent to a man of his keen and intuitive sagacity, that there was something of evident discomposure in the manner of the young officer as he spoke to him of his father-in-law.

But he must have been not only morally but physically blind had he not observed, as he turned again to the daughter of his old friend, that her beautiful face was buried in her hands, and that the big tears were trickling fast through her slender fingers.

By far too much a man of the world to make the least allusion to circumstances indicating mental affliction or strong feeling of any kind, which no words can alleviate, and at the same time, by far too shrewd a judge of human nature to attribute such a revulsion of manner to any casual accident, Pierre Delacroix turned aside, and walking down to the bivouac of the men, asked a few trivial questions about their route, the length of their marches and the like, and then directing one of them to bring up a can of coffee to the other fire, as soon as it should be ready, he returned, marveling greatly, and much disturbed in his mind, not less by the violent and overwhelming passion which he had so suddenly conceived for a married woman, than by the very strong suspicion he entertained, that there was something in the matter very seriously amiss.

Had the lady been out of the question, he would have been under no difficulty whatever; for, himself as free as the air, and as true as his own rifle, he would have asked as frankly of another any information he might desire to gain, as he would have imparted it himself if required to do so.

But, although in younger, perhaps happier days, he had mixed much in female society, and had been liberally and gently educated, years had now passed since he became the rover of the wilderness, the wild and daring Partisan, whose name was known everywhere, from the eternal snows of Mount Elias and the tempestuous waters of the wild Columbia, to the luxuriant forests and burned prairies of Texas and Mexico, and even to the distant Cordilleras—years, during which it might be said that he had

scarce looked upon a lady of his own class and station—years, during which his horse, his rifle, and his broadsword, had been his only friends; his comrades, but not his companions, any chance wanderers that he might find in field or forest, with whom to consort for the moment.

And, with the lapse of time, it was not so much that his tastes had changed, or his manners deteriorated, as that he lost the habitude of such society, and the confidence in his own powers, which is essential to success of any kind.

So that the man, who would have ridden alone without hesitation into a camp of hostile Black-feet, the man of inexhaustible resource and indomitable courage, the man who loved danger for itself, trembled and almost blushed through his weather-beaten and sun-hardened cheeks, in the presence of one trembling girl.

Here he felt that he (the veteran) was a tyro; here he knew his own deficiency in experience; here he admitted to himself that he might easily mistake the landmarks of the human mind, and blunder wofully and fatally, where some mere city coxcomb of eighteen would shine, and perhaps subdue.

He determined, therefore, as a wise and prudent man, to see all things, saying nothing, suffering events to take their own natural course, and reserving to himself the power of acting, whenever occasion should call for action, in behalf of the children of his oldest and most esteemed friend.

It must by no means be inferred, because it has been stated that he was stricken by a sudden and violent passion for the lovely woman he had so strangely met in so unusual a place, that the gallant Partisan had acknowledged to himself the fact, or even suspected for a moment that he loved the lady. He felt, indeed, something wholly different to any previous sensation of his life; but, had any one intimated to him that he was enamored of her, he would have at once set him down for a madman.

Yet he was in love, and that desperately; though with that simplicity which is so common among those who live hardily in the lap of nature, drawing their excitements from the harder and sterner passions of humanity, he had neither endeavored to analyze his own feelings, nor could have done so had he desired it.

When he returned to the camp-fire with the coffee, after the absence of but a few minutes, the lady had recovered her composure, although there was a cloud on her young husband's brow, and an angry light in his dark eye.

Sentiments, however, and feelings, nay even strong passions must give way for the ordinary wants of every-day life. Men eat and drink amid the most dreadful paroxysm of their least selfish griefs, in the intervals of the most rapturous pleasure; and, when the head of the house is scarce yet cold, and not so much as consigned to the sad coffin, the mourning family must gather round the cheerless board, and carve the joint, and pass the bottle, although their hearts may be well nigh breaking with inward agony.

And so it was with these chance comrades of the prairie, on the eventful night which first made them acquainted. The green carpet of the meadow was spread with their simple fare, and the Partisan did the honors of his camp with a singular blending of the frontiersman's bluntness, and the easy manners of the gentleman and soldier.

There was, however, an inexplicable gloom hanging over the little party, and scarcely was the frugal meal ended before, on the pretext of weariness, the lady retired to her tent, and the husband went away for a few minutes, as he said, to inspect his sentries, while Pierre Delacroix filled his Indian pipe with kinnekinnink, and, stretching himself at full length on his blanket, in the warmth of the fire, rested his head on his elbow, and mused more deeply than he had done for many a year, rolling out all the time great volumes of the odoriferous smoke of that Indian mixture, which he had learned to prefer to the Havana.

CHAPTER III.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STORY.

THE Partisan had not sat long alone, ere the young officer returned and joined him; yet, in that brief space, almost all the actions and adventures of a not uneventful life had passed through his mind; so strongly had his imagination been excited by the occurrences of the evening.

Nor was it only to a retrospective view that his spirit was moved, for something seemed to tell him that with the persons and circumstances of this night, coming events were to be connected; and that the great crisis of his life, whether for good or evil, was not now far distant. Feelings and forebodings of this nature are by no means unusual with men of ardent temperaments, and lively imaginations; and such a man, emphatically, was Pierre Delacroix, although familiarity with strange perils, and great experience, and yet greater confidence in his own resources, had tempered the heat of his blood, and overcome the inborn rashness of his temper, and, although he would have probably been sufficiently astonished, had he

been accused of possessing a romantic fancy, such surely was the case.

When these presentiments, as is the case nine times in ten, are followed by no results, they are forgotten as though they had never been; when, on the contrary, after events confirm them, they are regarded as almost miraculous, and narrated, from generation to generation, as distinct proofs of a supernatural agency, busy with the affairs of men.

Whatever may be the truth in this question, it is not within the scope of our unassisted intellect to determine it; nor do we propose further to touch upon it, than briefly to remark that such an impression was now strong on the mind of the Partisan, and that, although in no wise superstitious or liable to be diverted from his equanimity, much less from his course of right, by any similar influence, he was still moved somewhat, and was inclined to anticipate some coming evil, the expectation of which neither his reason nor his acquired instincts seemed to justify.

When the young soldier joined him, however, he shook off the strange sensations which were creeping over him, and sat upright to receive his guest.

"Come, Mr. Gordon," he said, "I fancy that by this time you have got your men settled for the night. Had you not better take your pipe, and sit down with me, that we may talk matters over? By something you let fall a while ago, it seems that you have been expecting to meet me at San Antonio, although I knew it not, nor have been there these two months. Now, you must have had some end in seeking me; and, until I know what end that is, I am at a loss to see how I can aid you."

"To make you understand that, Major Delacroix—"

"Pardon me, sir," replied the Partisan, hastily, "I have no great respect for titles of any kind, least of all for military titles, when not backed by military rank and command. Now, it is very true that I do hold a commission as a major of Texan Horse, dating as far back as the first blow that was struck for independence; but I have not held a command, nor have I struck a blow, or fired a shot, these ten years, save for my own pleasure; and I am no more a major now, God be praised, than I am a major-general, which seems to me about the worst berth a man can hold nowadays, under our government. No, sir, I am Pierre Delacroix, or Pierre, the Partisan, or plain Pierre, just as men choose to call me; but neither mister, nor major, nor any other gew-gaw title! Such things may do well enough in cities, though I, for one, do not care much about them, or think them very fitting even there; but, in the wilderness here, they are worse than naught. I'll none of them. So, if you please, you will call me Pierre, or Delacroix, or Partisan—which most of my friends do call me—as it best suits you. But none of your majors! No, no! none of your majors! Browne was a major, for he had seen service; and Ringold was a major, for he did service; and the service lives after the man, in the arm which he created, and which won every battle on the soil of Mexico, from Palo Alto down to Buena Vista. But I—no! no! God be praised! I am no major—I command no man but myself, and no man commands me, now or ever."

"To make you understand that, then," replied the young dragoon, a little embarrassed by the manner of the Partisan, and not exactly liking to address a person who, whatever might be his present position, had evidently, at some time or other, filled the place as he still preserved the air of a gentleman, by terms so familiar as he was directed to use—"I fear I must trouble you with rather a long narrative."

"The more need to begin it then at once," replied the Partisan, dryly, "or it will be morning before we have finished it. Here is a pipe," he continued, reaching from his valise a curiously carved Indian bowl, which he fitted to a stem and filled with the aromatic mixture of tobacco, willow-bark, and some sweet-scented herb: "have you learned yet to smoke kinnekinnink?"

"Oh! yes, I was for some time stationed at Prairie du Chien, and since that at the Council Bluffs; quite long enough, I assure you, to learn how to enjoy all the good things of this western country."

And receiving the pipe from his hand, he lighted it by aid of an ember from the wood-fire, and occupied himself so long in drawing it and setting it going, without saying one word about the subject to be considered, that Pierre began to grow impatient.

"Well," he said, blowing a great cloud of smoke out of his mouth, "you were going to tell me—" and he paused inquiringly.

"Yes. But confound me if I know where to begin!"

"At the beginning, I should suppose," said the Partisan, who was less and less satisfied with his manner.

"Unless I begin with my own birth," returned the other—"hang me if I know where the beginning is."

"I hope at least that I have nothing to do with that," said Pierre, with a grim smile.

"With what? I do not understand you."

"With your birth, to be sure. But for heaven's sake come to the point; you keep dodging about the bush as badly as a Mexican Guerrilla, and it is about as hard to find out where you would be."

"The truth is, that I hardly know myself," said the young man. "Except that I wish to the Lord I were not here."

"Look you here, young gentleman," replied the Partisan, coolly, "you either have or have not something to say to me. If you have, I shall be glad to hear it, and that as soon as possible. First, because I am something sleepy, and secondly, because if you wish my service, I must know how to serve you, which I will do gladly for your wife's sake. If you have nothing to say, I shall be glad to hear that; for then I can go to sleep now, and in the morning we can eat our breakfasts together, and sit upon our beasts, and shake hands, and so ride away, never, most likely, to meet any more."

"No, no; that will never do!" cried young Gordon. "For it is on you that we have counted all along for taking us safely to our journey's end."

"Well, we have gained something at least. Now where may that very definite place, which you call your journey's end, be? And, as the next question, what made you count upon me?"

"Our journey's end?—Taylor's camp, of course—where else should it be?"

"Anywhere else, I should think, considering the means you have of getting thither, and the company you have with you? You do not really mean to say that you contemplate carrying that beautiful and delicate young woman with you to head-quarters?—the thing is utter madness!"

"And yet my destination is head-quarters; and she has no home save my tent!"

"Julia Forester—John Forester's daughter, no home!" cried the Partisan, in far louder tones than he was wont to use, and starting to his feet, half indignant and half astonished. "Did I understand you aright, young sir? Did you say Julia Forester has no home save in the tent of a second lieutenant of dragoons?"

"I did say precisely that, Pierre Delacroix," answered the soldier, nettled a little by the manner of his questioner, and shaking off his momentary embarrassment the instant he was put upon his mettle.

"When I knew Colonel John Forester, he was reputed to be worth a million of dollars!" said Pierre.

"When I knew him," replied Arthur Gordon, "he was reputed to be worth two, at the lowest figure!"

"And has he become a bankrupt since then, or a beggar?" asked the other, sharply.

"Neither, that I ever heard. *Au contraire*, he is, all but one or two, the richest man they say in Louisiana."

"And why the devil, then, did he give you his daughter for a wife, and not give you the means to sustain her?"

"I never said that he did give her to me!" said the other, steadily.

"You said she was your wife."

"I did say so, and do."

"You stole her from him, then," and he spoke with extreme severity, and even laid his hand on the hilt of the only weapon he now bore—his hunting-knife. "You stole, from my old friend, my second father, from honest, brave John Forester, his daughter—his only child? Speak, young man, I must know all, now!"

"Stole is an awkward word, sir!" replied Gordon, whose face had flushed fiery red, while he was speaking. "A very awkward word for one soldier to hear applied to himself by another."

"A very awkward word, indeed, sir," answered the Partisan, even more coldly than before, "to hear; but a much more awkward thing to do! I hope yet to hear that you have not done it."

"You take a very strange way of learning. Insulting a man, is a new mode of insinuating yourself into his confidence."

"Hark you, sir!" said Pierre Delacroix. "Words are the names of things no more. All things have their right names; and here in the wilderness, far away from the hollowness and the falsehood of cities, men call things by their right names. I do at least, always, when I know them. Now you tell me that Julia Forester is your wife, and that John Forester did not give her to you, therefore the only two modes by which I can conceive your having acquired her, are buying or stealing! Men do not generally sell their daughters, except in Circassia—their wives, some English noblemen, I believe, and some of our Indians, I'm told, do sell—therefore I'm pretty sure you did not buy her; and thence, naturally I deduce it, that you stole her! Now I think stealing anything a very bad act—even an Indian horse-thief's horse. But to steal an old man's only daughter, is an atrocious act; and if you have done that act, you must look to hear that act called by its right and very name."

"In the first place, Julia is not John Forester's *only* daughter; in the second place, I must ask a definition of what you are pleased to call stealing a man's daughter."

"Not John Forester's only daughter? What

do you mean, sir? Do not trifles with me! It were not safe to do so: least of all on this subject."

"Before I reply, I await an answer to my question. How do you define 'stealing a man's daughter'?"

"Carrying her off clandestinely, of course; and marrying her without or against his consent. That is what I call stealing! You fine boys from the cities call it 'running away,' I believe, or 'eloping,' and think it a very knowing trick. I call it 'stealing,' and think it a very dirty trick. Now, do you understand?"

"Perfectly. And, though I have something further to say by and by on the subject, I beg to inform you that I did not *steal* Julia Forester, even by your definition. Since, though I certainly did carry her off, it was not clandestinely, but with distinct notice given that I should do so; and, though I certainly did marry her in the very teeth of her father's consent, I did so with as open a face, and as honest a heart as you bear at this instant, Pierre Delacroix! Now, sir," he added, raising his voice a little, "how did you dare to charge me with *stealing*, before you knew the fact that I had *stolen*, even according to your own showing?"

"Pshaw! pshaw! young sir, you do not know your man! Pierre Delacroix dares do anything!"

"Then I have been misinformed," returned the dragoon, with a great deal of dignity; "for I have always heard that Pierre Delacroix did not dare anything which misbecomes a man."

For an instant the dark eye of the Partisan flashed living fire, but, ere another had elapsed, he had re-collected himself, and controlled his hasty temper; and he replied with perfect quietude and self-respect:

"I believe that you are right, Lieutenant Gordon, and that I have spoken with improper bluntness; but, as I have said, we men of the South-west do not stand on your city nicety of phrases, and are apt to name things as it strikes us that they are, whether good or evil. Besides this, you must remember that John Forester is the oldest friend I have on earth; that I love, esteem and venerate him above every human being; and that a wrong done to him, or his, wounds me in the tenderest place. But I was wrong, I admit it, to assume that an injury had been done, however adverse appearances might be, until I knew the fact. That was unwise and unworthy of a man of experience. If this will satisfy you, accept it. When I have heard more of your tale, as I ought to have done before speaking, I may perhaps be enabled to offer you more. Until then, this must suffice."

"And it does suffice," answered Gordon, sitting down, "for I can respect your motives, even when I cannot tolerate your manner. But it is possible that a young man may be justified in carrying off an old man's daughter; and if you will be pleased to hear me out, I think you will admit that I was."

"It will be hard to make me believe that John Forester was sordid, selfish, or unreasonable; and unless he were one of these I cannot conceive any justification."

"What if he were under the dominion, and acted at the dictation of another?"

"John Forester! Impossible!"

"We are but playing at cross-purposes. You were best to hear me out, and so substitute a short story for a long debate."

"Pray let us do so."

"It is six years since I first visited New Orleans: and being the bearer of letters to Colonel Forester was received hospitably and entertained in his house, where he then lived nominally alone, with the exception of his only daughter, Julia, at that time a beautiful girl of fourteen. Being very young myself, we were thrown much together, a sort of childish affection, half liking and half love grew up between us—not altogether childish either; for it constantly increased during the three years which I spent in the city, until it became a powerful passion. So evident was our mutual partiality from the very first that it was a matter of jest among the friends of the family, and Colonel Forester himself used to call Julia, 'Mrs. Gordon.' When I entered the army, on the first raising of the second dragoon regiment and before leaving the city for the North-west, I had an explanation with the colonel; and it was understood and agreed, that at some future period, which was left undecided, Julia should be my wife. We were permitted to correspond, and I mounted my horse and rode away with my regiment, as light-hearted and as happy a soldier as ever set jack boot in steel stirrup. Amid the wild excitement of a frontier life, among hardships, and toils, and something of actual perils, the reflection of the past and the hope of the future never left me. From time to time—at long intervals, it is true, but still sufficiently often to keep interest and hope alive and warm within me, I received letters from my betrothed, of which I shall only say that they were all that the most sanguine lover could desire."

"After a while, however, a difference in their tone became apparent. Not, indeed, in the manifestation of affection, but of hope. There was a despondency, a fear, an occasional expression of anxiety and doubt—indefinite, and

The Silent Rifleman.

coupled with strong injunctions, not to comment upon it in my replies, which was more than enough to harass my mind and drive me almost mad. Ere long the despondency expressed in her letters increased, until it became something akin to despair. She spoke openly of adverse interests at work against us, of underhand and illegitimate influences, with dark allusions to persecution and domestic tyranny, from quarters the most infamous and degrading; but all still coupled with the injunction to be silent, to hope for the best, and to trust all to her affection. At length, her letters ceased altogether; and I was months without receiving any tidings from her. When the present war broke out I was eastward to recruit and had no opportunity of visiting New Orleans, although my brain and my heart were both on fire to do so. Three months since I received, the first time for nearly a year, a short hurried agonizing note from Julia, entreating me to come near her, without an instant's delay, as her misery was too great to be endured, and one way or other she must release herself from it. For once, fortune favored me; for the same post which brought her letter, brought orders to the captain of my company to send me forward instantly with the men we had raised, to the very city in which I most desired to be. A fortnight afterward I was on the spot and learned all the infamous and horrid truth.

"Your friend the high and honorable soldier, whom I had known of old—the very pattern and impersonation of uprightness, and chivalry, and true nobility of soul—had so far lapsed in the decline of his intellectual powers from his once glorious standard, as to have made a colored woman—his own emancipated slave and formerly his mistress—his lawful wife and the partner of his fortunes; placing her openly at the head of his table, and bringing his illegitimate daughters, the offspring of his foul concubinage, into equality of station and society with his own beautiful, and pure, and noble child—with my Julia!"

"Great God!" exclaimed the Partisan, bounding to his feet almost in fury; "great God! can this be so? Can age and the natural decline of the mental faculties so change the highest and most virtuous characters—so transform the purest and most generous into the base, the groveling, the sensual—so degrade the almost godlike man below the animal? Great God! can this be so? Would—would to heaven that he had died before he did the deed of shame! Would that I had been near to him; for, by the Lord that liveth if neither argument nor entreaty should have had power to prevail over such low and beastlike passion, my hand—my own hand, which has caressed his cheeks and played with his gray hairs so often—my own hand should have spared him the infamy, and slain him in his untainted honor. Go on! go on! Lieutenant Gordon—I have wronged myself by my suspicion! But who could have dreamed of this? Go on! go on! I will make you amends, if it cost me my life!"

"But this was not all, nor half of all, that poor Julia suffered; for the incarnate devil, whom I must call Mrs. Forester, not content with forcing the deluded old man into the rescinding of his will, and bequeathing all but a mere pittance to herself and bas-born children, never ceased persecuting him day or night, till she procured his promise to send Julia secretly away to Europe, there to be immured in a convent; fearing unquestionably that if she should be married to an American gentleman and soldier, her husband would find some means to frustrate the enormities she had planned so artfully, and secure a share at least of the partial old man's fortunes. I had an interview with him, though not without much difficulty; I offered to forego all—to sign away all claim on her behalf and my own, provided he would give me her hand, portionless and alone. For a while I thought I had prevailed; but the fiend entered the room, and I saw the old man quail before the gaze of her fierce, snake-like eye, and all was lost. Then, I, too, lost my temper; and I swore by the God who made me, and by the hell to which that woman's deeds were leading her, that her plans should be frustrated, and that Julia should be my wife in spite of man or devil. I got brief leave of absence, on the promise to join at head-quarters before the last day of the present month—embarked my recruits with my second lieutenant; and on the third day after, Forester's garden wall was scaled, his daughter's window broken, and before the day dawned she was my bride.

"Still flight was needful, and we fled; for by his wrath, and the unscrupulous wickedness of her who prompted him, we might still have been separated for a while, if not forever. We fled, I say, to Natchez, and thence to Nachitoches, where by good fortune I found the little squad of dragoons who escort me, making their way down the river to join my party, which they had been detailed to enter as a veteran nucleus. With them, and this letter to yourself from an old friend of mine, who has, I believe, lived with you, Frank Arrowsmith of ours, I have made my way thus far safely; though sorely disappointed at not meeting you, as I hoped to do, in San Antonio de Bexar. This is

the whole that I have done—you have heard all. The rest remains with you."

"Well, sir, you have done well. As well as any man could do; and not only as well, but the only thing that a man and a gentleman could do, even if it were for a woman he did not love. Had he done otherwise, he would deserve shooting. The rest, you say, remains with me; but what that rest is, unless it be to offer you my hand, and to ask your pardon very frankly for my rudeness, I know not."

"Oh! that is granted, I assure you, without asking it," said Gordon, evidently well pleased at having got through his unpleasant disclosure, and wringing the hard hand of the Partisan as heartily as it was freely offered. "I meant, however, something very different, as you will see, when you shall have opened Frank Arrowsmith's dispatch."

"Which there would be mighty little use in doing to-night, seeing that our camp-fires have all burned low, and will soon be out—which is a good thing, by the way, since all the service they could render us would be to bring down a half-dozen roving Comanches, or some of that scoundrel Carrera's ragamuffin horde, upon our bivouac. I could not see to read it, if I were to open it; and, as it regards yourself, I fancy you can tell me the contents as well or better than any one."

"Why, he expected that we should find you at San Antonio—why, I am sure, I do not know—"

"Nor I, by Heaven! since I never sleep in a town or in a bed three times a year, if I can help it," said the Partisan.

"And in that expectation gave me a letter to you, commanding us to your care. He told me that if you would undertake it, you could guide us in safety into Taylor's camp through all the guerrillas in Mexico."

"He did me too little and too much justice. Too little, in supposing that there was any *if* about it. The idea of Pierre Delacroix refusing to guide or assist a lady in the midst of danger! As to my being *able* to carry you safely into Taylor's camp, that's quite another thing. According to him, the old Partisan is worth more than a whole New York regiment—for the last news was that Lally is cut off, and has laid down his arms, with all the eleventh, to a horde of these guerrilla vagabonds. I don't believe one-half of it, to be sure; but what is true is this, that not a single train has got through safely in the last four months—no, not the half of a train, though they are convoyed, each by five or six hundred foot, and a company or two of dragoons. Oh! there is the devil to pay, I can tell you. These fellows are getting their pluck up, and are beginning to fight like the deuce under their own leaders. There's that fellow, the Padre Jarauta, as they call him, will give Uncle Sam more trouble than Santa Anna and the whole lot of his generals. Here to-day, and a hundred miles off to-morrow. Nothing but horse are worth a cent against them: and we have no horse to speak of, and what we have, for the most part, scarce worth the forage of their horses. You dragoon fellows and the mounted rifles can do your work; but I would not give Jack Hays and one company of his old rangers for all the volunteer horse together. Not one man in ten can sit his horse if it swerves, as they all do when it comes under fire. More saddles are emptied, in every charge, by the fellows tumbling slap out of them, than by the bullets of the enemy. It is enough to make a horse swear to think of the blundering of the government at home. They seem to think that cavalry are made in five minutes, and that the moment they have stuck five or six hundred country lawyers and village storekeepers upon the backs of unbroken and unbitten wagon-horses, they are at once *horse*. Why, Heaven save the mark! with the exception of artillery alone, there is no arm in the service that needs so much training as horse. Give me five thousand *good* horse, and a battery or two of curricles guns and mountain howitzers, and I'll engage to keep all our communications open far and near; and, till they do so, we shall always be blocked up, as we are now, and hemmed in with these scoundrels almost in sight of our outposts."

"You think, then, that there is great risk?"

"I must not deceive you. I do think so. I am just on my return from a long scout on my own hook, as they say, through all this border country, and a good way inland, too, for I had a notion to find out what was going forward where our fellows have not been. So I struck northward from Monterey and held to the westward of San Fernando, and Gigeo, and Monclova; and then, to the northward of the last, turned easterly so far as Espada, whence I was about to make my way back to Monterey as fast as Emperor could carry me; for, between ourselves, I have picked up some information that old Zachary would give one of his ears to have now, and I have captured some dispatches, also. But they must wait, it seems, for I am no one's man now, as I told you, and they can neither cashier me for disobedience, nor shoot me for deserting—that is one comfort; and, since such is the case, why I must try to see you and my old friend's—damn it! I scarce-

ly know if I ought to call him friend—daughter out of the scrape. Though how I am to do it, hang me if I know. Can she ride well?"

"Better than any man in the regiment! Her hand is like a feather, her seat as firm as a rock, and her nerve most miraculous."

"And her endurance? That is the quality there is most likelihood of testing."

"We have never made less than thirty miles any day; and she has never shown fatigue."

"We may have to make sixty; and, fifty to one, shall have to leave those mules behind us."

"Is there so much danger?"

"The country is alive with horse. Every village is in arms, every rancho has turned out its riders; and keen riders they are, I assure you. Why, between us and the fences, and all the way toward Encinos, there are not less than a thousand men scattered about in little bands from six to fifty and upward. Here we are above the Presidio road, and what the devil brought you above it I don't know, and I am sure you don't. I fancy you must have lost your way. You should have gone down as low as Mier or Camargo; or, better yet, to Matamoras; and so taken the chance of a train and convoy. But it is no use talking about it now; for that game's up."

"Why up?"

"Carrera and five hundred horse are between us and Revilla now, partly on the look-out for your humble servant; I had half a mind to go down and take a look at them, till I met you. If I could get within three hundred yards of the dog, I'd pay him a debt that Brown Bess"—he smiled grimly, and tapped the breech of his rifle—"owes him."

"And is there no chance of running the gantlet of their parties, and getting through clear?"

"None, under heaven! They know that I have got these dispatches, and fancy that I shall try to fall down upon Mier. But I am no fool. Our only chance is the straight inland road, keeping clear of the villages, and traveling hereafter, as much as we can by night. I shall be easier when we have got old Bravo here between us and the hounds."

"Are they so formidable?"

"I can hardly fancy irregular horse more formidable. They are capitally, though slightly mounted—well armed with a lance fourteen feet long, with a sharp steel head of eighteen inches; two escopetas, or light ounce ball, carbines; a long straight sword, a knife and lasso, with which they can catch you or your horse anywhere they please, both at full gallop. They ride admirably, and fight devilish well. Do you call that formidable?"

"Rather so, I must confess."

"Rather so! I believe you! Why, it was only yesterday morning, eight of them stole upon me while I was eating my breakfast under the lee of a musket thicket. I shot one with my rifle before I backed Emperor, and two with my pistols afterward; and charged through them sword in hand, knocking one head over heels, and cutting another half through the shoulder. But the other three still stuck to me, firing their cursed escopetas—one of them did send a bullet through my hunting-shirt and barked my bridle arm—and, as the ground was deep and boggy, I could not ride away from them; they chased me all of five miles, and curse me! if I dared to see how far off they were from me, for fear of seeing a lance point within a hand's breadth of my kidneys. Faith! I believe they were so close as that to me once. I could not get time to load a weapon; I had put up my sword, to hold the horse together better in the deep ground, and to tell you the truth, I did think that my time was come, and expected nothing but a dig with a spear in the small of my back, or a check with a lasso round my neck, at every stride of the horse. At last, to my great joy, I saw a stream before me, the first I had seen in two days; a deep, muddy, black-looking brook, creeping along with dark eddies between very boggy banks. It must have been twenty feet of water, if it was an inch. 'Here goes,' I cried aloud; 'if I get over it, curse me if they can!' So I sat well down in the saddle, and took Emperor hard by the head, and sent my spurs in rowel deep; and we were over in a minute! By good luck, though, I knew what was coming, as if by instinct; so I whipped my knife out in a second, and held it straight before my face, with the back touching my nose and chin; so when the bloody lasso came, as I knew it would, whistling over my head and about my ears, it took the edge of the blade before it took my windpipe, and was in two pieces before you could say 'cut.' Then I looked round, I promise you. I wish you'd seen the Don's face, with his black eyes goggling, and his mouth wide open, when he saw his lasso come home empty. 'Es el diablo mismo' said he. So I gave him a grin and a yell, and began to load my rifle, as fast as I could. So, seeing that their escopetas were all three empty, and that their lassoes could not reach me, and that their nags could not take the water, why they began to think discretion the better part of valor and took themselves off as quickly as they could; not so quickly *verg*—for their

horses were pretty well blown, and the bog deep and treacherous—but that I got Bess loaded, and knocked one of them out of his saddle, for a finish. He must have been nigh four hundred yards off, so that I did not kill him, but he sat mighty clumsily in his saddle when he climbed up again. That's the last brush I had with them, and now my pipe's out, and it's late. Do you go and bid your men to put no more wood on the fires, and lie down one and all, and get all the sleep they can. They will need it, before we reach Monterey."

"What! will you have no sentinel?"

"I would rather have my brown horse, Emperor, for a sentinel, than all the dragoons in the United States, or out of it. Though he is lying down and asleep now, he has got one ear pricked, and one eye open, I'll be bound for him. Do what I bid you, and then get to your bed yours'lf. I will wake you before the morning star is up, to-morrow."

Gordon arose, well satisfied that the Partisan knew his business far better than he, and went away to do his bidding, much to the delight of the unfortunate dragoon, who was pacing up and down with his carbine in the hollow of his arm, envying his more lucky comrades their sound and healthy slumbers.

This duty done, the young officer hurried back to his tent and his fair bride; and, in doing so, passed close to the bivouac of the Partisan.

He had wrapt himself close in the handsome blanket, with his knife drawn in one hand, and his pistol in the other, ready for instant defense on the least alarm; and, with his head resting in the hollow of his large Spanish saddle, was already buried in deep and dreamless sleep.

In ten minutes more there was not an eyelid open, of man or animal, in the encampment; and the broad lustrous Northern moon, sailing in a flood of silver glory through the azure firmament, alone watched over them, like the unsleeping eye of an all-seeing Providence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASSAGE OF THE BRAVO.

The stars were beginning to grow pale in heaven, and a faint grayish tint was creeping gradually upward from the Eastern horizon, and usurping the dark azure of the cloudless sky, when the light sleep of the Partisan was interrupted by the long tremulous low whining of his favorite horse.

He started to his feet in an instant, and listening eagerly, and again laying his ear to the ground, as on the previous evening, speedily became aware that a large body of horse was passing along the hard prairie, not far from the skirts of the timber. Instantly awakening the young lieutenant and his dragoons, he bade them strike tent, load the mules, and saddle the chargers with all possible speed and silence, keeping their arms ready, for that danger was at hand.

This done, he took up his trusty rifle, and stole away with a noiseless step to reconnoiter the party, which had now come so near that the clank of the steel scabbards against the stirrup irons was distinctly audible above the hollow sound of the horses' tramps.

The noise, however, gradually died away, the troopers having evidently ridden down the outer edge of the forest to the southward, without noticing the track left by the horses of our company.

Within ten minutes, Pierre returned with a very serious countenance.

"There are above a hundred of them," he said; "regular lancers of Carrera's band. They have gone southward for the present; but we may expect them back within an hour, for they are evidently on the look-out for our trail, which they must have followed from the last bottom, and lost at night on the dry prairie; had the morning been one hour more advanced, they must have seen it, and we should have been all killed, before this time; for they make no prisoners."

"There is no time to lose, then," said Gordon, hastily, looking with an anxious eye to the face of his wife, who was already equipped and ready to mount. "Let us get to horse at once, and put the river between them and us."

"That is soon done, so far as we men are concerned," replied the Partisan; "but how do you get her across rivers such as this? It is a broad stream, and the current runs like a mill-race. It is enough to dazzle the eyes and turn the head of a strong man to swim it, let alone a lady."

"We have an India-rubber pontoon here," he answered, pointing to a sort of oval bag of that material, depending from two air cylinders of the same stuff, which, when inflated, and distended by two or three short staves, form a rude boat, and which, when not in use, can be folded into a small compass, and packed on a mule's saddle. "It is all ready, and can be drawn to the further bank, easily, by the cord coiled in the bow."

"Let her get in, then, in God's name!" replied the Partisan, "for all this takes time, and we have little enough of that to spare."

And, with the words, he led his own horse, now fully accoutered, down to the shore, at the

spot where he had watered the animal on the previous evening, followed by the dragoons, three of whom led the beasts, while one carried the light pontoon.

Gordon brought up the rear, with his fair delicate wife hanging upon his arm, and smiling with serene and beautiful confidence in the protection of her gallant husband. Arrived on the bank, all the dragoons mounted and entered the broad and rapid river, which could not at this spot have been less than five hundred yards in width. Three of them leading the pack mules and the lady's jennet, and the fourth carrying in his hand the reel on which was wound the tough cord of twisted hide, by which the frail bark was to be drawn across the whirling current.

So strong was the stream that, although the horses swam well and stoutly, and although the dragoons were as well trained to the management of their horses in the water as on dry land, they were carried a great distance down the river before they were enabled to make the opposite bank; and the cord attached to the pontoon, long as it was, would have proved insufficient, had not the Partisan run down the hither shore with the light boat in his arms, thus easing the strain, until he reached a point opposite to the spot, where, with a fearful struggle, the half-exhausted animal succeeded in landing.

Then with a bright eye and a cheerful smile on her lovely face, the soft and delicate young woman entered the frail vessel, which sunk so deeply in the water, even under her slight burthen, that the extreme edges only of the cylinders which supported it were visible above the surface of the swift glancing waters.

"Shut your eyes, you were best, sweet lady," cried the rough veteran of the woods, moved almost to tears by the dauntless heroism of one so young, so gentle, and so tender—for she showed not a sign of terror in committing herself to a bark which many of the hardiest fars that ever braved the perils of a storm-tossed ocean would have refused to enter. "The rapid whirl of those waters will dazzle your eyes, and if your head fail you, there will be peril indeed."

"It will not fail me," she said, with a calm smile. "My heart will keep it steady. I am sure there is little danger; and if there be danger, I would rather at least meet it with my eyes open, and look upon him to the last," and, with the word, she laid her hand playfully on Gordon's shoulder.

He caught her in his arms, and strained her to his heart, which beat far more wildly than her own at the thought of the peril she ran, while a tear sparkled for a moment in his clear gray eye.

A strange pang, which, in the simplicity of his bold, honest heart, was unaccountable to himself, shot through the bosom of the Partisan, as he looked on that warm and close embrace; as he saw that exquisite form clasped, palpitating, in the permitted arms of her husband. He started at the new sensation, but he had not the time, if he had the inclination, to analyze it.

For, tearing herself away suddenly from his arms, she seated herself in her nautilus skiff, and cried, in a merry voice:

"Now, push me off, and be sure you keep the boat steady."

The husband's heart failed him, as he obeyed her bidding, and paid out the line, from another reel similar to that held by the dragoon on the further shore, which hindered the little boat from falling bodily down the stream.

The danger was, however, greater in appearance than in reality, for the pontoon was so buoyant, and the weight it bore so trifling, that it breasted the current gallantly; and the light laugh of the lady came pleasantly to the ears of the husband and his comrade, as, pleased by the easy motion, she waved her kerchief gayly, really amused and rejoiced at what might well have terrified hearts which should have been stouter, and nerves of heavier mold.

The soldiers on the other shore reeled the strong line in actively, and in the same proportion Frank Gordon paid it out; till, after a safe and gentle navigation of perhaps ten minutes, he had the satisfaction of seeing the pontoon made fast to the bank, and his fair bride lifted out with assiduous though rugged courtesy, by the stout soldiers, who had learned to love their lieutenant's lady, for the gentle, yet spirited endurance with which she supported every hardship, and the gay mirth with which she made light of every danger.

Scarce was she landed, ere she was seated on the back of her beautiful and docile palfrey, which, recruited by its night's rest and plentiful pasture, pawed the earth, eager to be once more in motion, and neighed clear and shrill in invitation to his comrades. Gordon had already ridden a yard or two into the river, when he was attracted by the singular aspect and expression of the Partisan. Both horse and man stood like statues, carved by a master hand to express the utmost anxiety and expectation.

The charger's fine limbs positively trembled with excitement; his small thin ears were pricked acutely forward; his large eyes dilated; and his nostrils distorted to the utmost, and as red as blood.

Pierre sat erect in his saddle, gazing with his keen dark eye into the recesses of the forest, his left hand raised to his ear, for he had let fall his reins on the disciplined charger's neck, and his cocked rifle ready in the right.

The next instant, a single Mexican came into view, wheeling his small but fiery horse round the thicket, which had sheltered their encampment, at full gallop.

His scarlet poncho streaming far behind him in the current created by the swiftness of his own motion through the atmosphere; his high-crowned hat glittering with silver ornaments; his gaily fringed and embroidered leggins, and his long straight sword clattering against his huge wooden stirrup, or jingling against his great uncouth spurs, rendered him a singularly picturesque and striking object, amid the wild and luxuriant scenery of the forest, glimmering as it was in the still dewy twilight of the early dawn.

He was viewed, however, by eyes which cared little for his picturesque attire, and thought little of effects or accidents—as a painter would have styled them—which, at another time, would have filled one of them, at least, with ecstatic admiration. He did not at first observe the Partisan, so motionless did he stand, backed by a thick clump of thorny bushes which gave no relief to his dark charger and sad colored garments, but galloped fiercely forward, spurring his horse violently, and evidently following the track of the party which he was pursuing, and which he probably believed to be far more remote than it indeed was.

The rifle of the Partisan rose slowly, and, with a steady motion, to his shoulder, and there remained as still and firm as though it and the extended arm which supported it, had been wrought in bronze or iron.

Its bead bore full on the exposed breast of the Mexican, with an eye keen and sure as the soaring eagle's, glaring along the barrel, and a finger to which no extremity of peril could communicate the slightest tremor, pressing along the trigger.

Had that trigger been drawn, no mortal aid could have availed to save the forfeit life; but the Partisan paused to see whether the rider was alone or had followers. Had a second horseman come into sight, the flash would have followed the sight, and sure death the ragged bullet.

But no follower appeared, and now the ranchero—for such he seemed to be—was within forty yards of Pierre, when he saw the horse, the man, the leveled rifle—when he recognized the being he most feared on earth—the famous Partisan. Wheeling his horse in an instant, by dint of his cruel massive bit, which threw him on his haunches, as if by magic, the terrified wretch turned to fly in the direction of the troopers, who had gone down to the southward, and were not probably even now more than a mile distant.

Satisfied by the man's flight that he was unsupported, Pierre rapidly uncocked his rifle, and threw it to the ground, turning as he did so to forbid Gordon—who had unslung his carbine, and now half suspecting treachery in his guide, was raising it to his eye—from firing.

"Not for your life!" he cried—"not for your life! Cross the river, and ride westward. I will deal with this dog."

And, with the word, gathering up the reins in his left hand, he gave Emperor the spur so suddenly that he bounded six feet into the air, with all his feet together, and dashed at once into his tearing gallop.

Meanwhile the rider had uncoiled the lasso, which hung from the pommel of his saddle, and whirling it around his head in the true Spanish fashion, thundered along in pursuit of the fugitive at a tremendous pace.

The Mexican had, it is true, some fifty yards the start of his pursuer, and knowing that he was riding for his life, or at least for his liberty, plied his long-roweled spurs with desperate energy.

The animal he rode was swift and active, though small and low of size, being descended probably from the old Andalusian blood, and the best in Europe from its greater admixture with the Moorish strain, which was imported to this continent by its first conquerors.

But fleet and high-spirited as it was, it had not the least chance of contending against the vastly superior power and longer stride of the Anglo-American thoroughbred. On drove the Emperor, covering sixteen feet at every stroke, and gaining every second upon the trembling fugitive. Now he was within twenty yards' distance, when the ranchero, turning in his saddle, deliberately leveled his escopeta at the Partisan. It would seem, however, that he had not calculated upon his enemy's being armed with the formidable lasso, or upon his ability in using it; for the instant he saw it circling in the air around his head, and on the point of being cast against him, his whole countenance altered, and he trembled so violently that it scarce seemed possible he could retain his seat in the saddle. In another moment his carbine would have been discharged, and the alarm communicated to the other troopers; but ere he could pull the trigger, the Partisan wheeled Emperor in a quick move,

ment of his hand and thigh, and hurled the tremendous missile as sure and almost as swift as his own unerring bullet.

The noble horse, well knowing his part in what was about to ensue, stopped dead short in his full career, the Partisan throwing himself back in the stirrups, and sitting as perfectly unmoved by the shock, as if he had been a portion of the charger he bestrode.

But that was not the only feat which the instinct and experience of the gallant beast had taught him; for, bracing every muscle of his wiry and elastic frame, he leaned so far over on the side opposite to that whence the lasso had been sped, that he would have fallen, but for the violent resistance which ensued instantly.

Aimed by an eagle eye, and launched by a master hand, the terrible noose encircled both the forelegs of the Mexican horse as he sprung forward, was drawn taut on the instant by the very speed of the trammelled captive, and hauled horse and rider headlong to the earth, with a violence which left both for an instant senseless.

The tremendous force of such a check can better be conceived than described; but it was so great that in spite of the superior weight and bone of the Emperor, it would probably have cast him also to the ground, but for the position in which he received the shock; and, as it was, he was dragged several yards, his hoofs literally plowing up the forest soil in deep furrows before he could recover perfect control of his limbs.

The next moment Pierre had leaped from his saddle and sprung upon his captive almost before he opened his eyes on recovering from his terrible fall.

Ere he had regained his senses he was disarmed, and his arms pinioned so far behind him, that, although he could use his hands and forearms from the elbow, he could not raise them to his head, or make any attempt to either strike or parry.

His horse was next released from the lasso, and allowed to recover his feet, which it did, trembling with terror, and sweating at every pore, but not nearly so much shaken or bruised by so violent a fall as might have been expected, owing probably to the softness of the ground.

The noose of the lasso was now transferred to the neck of the unhappy Mexican, whose swarthy features had changed to a sort of greenish-yellow hue, standing as he did in imminent terror of instant death by strangulation, of which, indeed, he appeared to be in no small risk.

"Life!" he cried, piteously, in Spanish, "life! for the love of God, and the most holy Virgin! For charity! give me my life, Senor Americano!"

"Mount your horse, fool!" replied the Partisan, sternly; "who the devil do you think would trouble himself to take such a miserable life as yours. Mount your horse, I say, and cease your howling, or I will send my knife through your coward heart!" He also used the Spanish tongue, which he spoke not only idiomatically, but with all the ease and fluency of a native; and to enforce his threats, he laid his hand with a grim smile on the hilt of his formidable wood-knife.

Admonished thus, the man climbed awkwardly to his saddle, and when once there was secured in his seat by Pierre, who, cutting the lasso from the Mexican saddle, fastened his feet with it under his horse's belly, though not so tightly as to deprive him of the necessary command of the animal.

This done, he released his arms, and bidding him in a stern, quiet voice, follow him close and silently, if he did not desire to be strangled, he leaped lightly into his own saddle, and cantered back toward the river, followed by his captive, who took admirable care to keep so nigh to his conqueror that the strain of the harsh cord about his neck should not be drawn any tighter.

In the mean time, Lieutenant Gordon, who had at first watched the chase with some apprehension, and very great anxiety lest the fugitive should escape, had no sooner seen the lasso hurled, and the downfall of man and horse, than, perfectly content to trust all to the skill and judgment of a man who had exhibited such readiness of thought and action, he addressed himself to obey his directions; and, putting his horse steadily down the bank into the river, swam it gallantly, holding his pistols above his head in his right hand, in order keep the powder dry in case of future emergency.

Before he was half way across, the Partisan came up at a brisk hard canter, with his trembling prisoner in tow, whose sword, pistols, and escopeta he threw into the river, and then taking his own pistols from the holsters, and holding them aloft, like Gordon, plunged in himself and swam stoutly over, dragging the unfortunate ranchero in mortal terror after him.

"Whom, in the name of everything that is wonderful!" cried Julia, half laughing at the woe-begone expression and blanched features of the Mexican, half crying from the excitement he had undergone. "Whom have you got there, Partisan, and what are you going to do with him?"

"A Mexican spy, lady," replied the frontiers-

man, as coolly as if he had not ridden faster than a foot's pace for the last hour. "And I am going to cut his ears off, if he tells me the least bit of a lie; and to hang him up by the heels for the vultures and carrion crows to eat, if he makes the least offer to escape."

Which pleasant intentions he forthwith made clearly comprehensible to the prisoner, who had previously given some signs of appreciating his meaning, which he gathered from the gestures of the speaker, by translating his last words into very choice Spanish for his especial benefit.

Thereupon followed *Misericordias!* and *Santissima Virgins!* and *nombre de Dios!* beyond all powers of mortal computation; the poor devil working himself into a perfect paroxysm of terror, until at length, compassionating his miserable apprehensions and his tears—for he actually wept as he implored his life from the pitiless man, as he supposed, into whose hands he had fallen—Julia relieved him, by assuring him, in pure Castilian, which fell deliciously soft and musical from her gentle lips, that his life was in no danger, since Americans never slew their prisoners, especially in the presence of their ladies; and that even his ears should be spared, provided he told them the truth, and made no effort to escape before they should reach their friends. In which event, she added, he should not only be restored to liberty, but rewarded. His thanks were profuse, and his promises unbounded; thanks and promises, both of which Pierre cut short by a grim glance and a twitch of the halter, which still encircled his neck; after which summary process, for the enforcement of silence he said, with a courteous gesture to the lady, "Now then, if you please, we will be moving. We are well across the river, and can put this belt of wood between ourselves and the enemy; they may not seek here and so may miss us altogether."

CHAPTER V.

THE DOUBLE TRAITOR.

THERE was no discussion or debate, so evidently correct was the plan of the Partisan; nor had his views been much more questionable than they were, is it at all probable that any opposition would have been made, so completely had he gained the confidence of the whole party, by his promptitude, his gallantry, and his extraordinary coolness in danger. The heads of all the horses, therefore, were turned westward, and away they rode at as rapid a rate as the nature of the ground—which was in places very deep and swampy, and at others very much incumbered with brakes of thorny underwood—permitted. In the present order of the march, the most danger being anticipated from the rear, the oldest and most intelligent of the dragoons was detached to a hundred yards in front, followed by the three others; two leading the pack mules, and the third having charge of the prisoner, about whose neck one end of the lasso was still secured, while the other was made fast to the pommel of the soldier's saddle. This man rode with his carabine unslung, the butt resting on his right thigh, cocked, and in readiness for instant service, his orders being peremptory, to shoot the prisoner through the head on his giving the slightest indication of any desire to escape or to raise an alarm.

After these, Gordon and his fair bride rode together, conversing at times in a low voice, but yet oftener keeping silence, so much were the hearts of both oppressed by the singular difficulty, if not peril, of their situation. Indeed, it is probable that, had not each desired to deceive the other as to their state of mental disquietude, neither would have spoken at all; but the husband, anxious to support the spirits, and if possible to alleviate the apprehensions of the fair being whom he almost reproached himself for having brought thus into the howling wilderness, exerted himself to the utmost to appear confident and even cheerful, while the lady, no less solicitous to conceal what natural tremors her sex could not cast entirely aside, displayed the most wonderful self-possession, added to the liveliest flow of spirits, and the highest courage that ever graced a fair and gentle woman.

In the rear of all rode the Partisan, alone, at nearly a hundred yards' distance from the little group which preceded him; and he alone of the whole party seemed perfectly cool and unconcerned, although, in truth, there was not one among them who so fully envisaged the circumstances of their position, and saw so clearly the whole extent of their danger.

Had he been alone, he would have undertaken the whole risk, without hope either of fame or guerdon, for the mere fun of outwitting and circumventing the Mexican troopers; but incumbered in his movements by the disciplined regulars—for whom, like all frontiersmen, he entertained a profound contempt—and impeded by the presence of a delicate and tender female, he almost despaired of making good his way through the wilderness to head-quarters.

As they galloped onward, however, through the belt of timber which bordered the Western as well as the Eastern marge of the Bravo del Norte, time slipped away and brought no sounds of pursuit from the rear. An hour had passed since they crossed the river, and the forest, breaking away into scattered clumps and single

trees, suffered the eye to roam, at intervals, beyond its tufted thickets and green alleys, over the broad expanse of the boundless prairie, which lay outstretched for countless miles before them; now laughing gayly in the fresh morning sunshine.

Just as they were approaching so nearly to the margin of the open ground, that the dragoon, who acted as vedette, was looking round for orders, Pierre uttered a shrill, long-drawn whistle, which was the preconcerted signal for a halt; and after the rest of the party had pulled up their horses, galloped forward himself till he reached the extreme verge of the covert, where, without speaking a single word, he dismounted, fastening his charger to a tree, and advanced stealthily into the open prairie.

After being absent about twenty minutes, during which the remainder of his party had lost sight of him altogether, he returned with a thoughtful expression on his strongly-marked features, and walked through the little group of dragoons and pack mules, until he reached Gordon and his fair bride, who sat on their panting horses, eagerly awaiting his approach.

"Have you heard anything," he asked, quietly, "from the forest in our rear?"

"Not a sound," replied the young officer;

"not so much even as the chirrup of a bird, or

the rustle of a deer among the leaves."

"Ah! you have not a woodsman's ear," answered the Partisan, who had been listening eagerly even while he was speaking. "There are deer, if not elk, within four hundred yards of us now, and they are in confusion, too; but, as we are to windward of them, and there is a brisk breeze from the northward, it may be they have caught our taint upon the air. If not, those accursed lancers have doubled on their track, and crossed the river on us." With these words, he knelt as he had done on the previous night, and again laying his ear to the ground, listened, holding his breath the while, to the faint sounds which had reached his ears alone.

In a minute he arose with a countenance less perturbed than before, and said, nodding his head in approbation:

"Ay, so far, all is well; they have gone southward. It is we who alarmed them, and that course is clear for the present. Now listen to me, lieutenant, and give me your advice, for if I know better than you how to keep our line of route, and avoid the enemy, you know the best how much this dear lady can endure."

"Speak out, Partisan," answered the young husband. "I will deal frankly with you, and I pray you to do so with us."

"I shall," answered Pierre, hastily. "Mark me. There is not a human being in sight on the prairie, and I have swept it, I am sure, twelve times in every direction. Those fellows who started us this morning, are, I think, so far in our rear, that unless by a miracle they turn and fall upon our trail, they will hardly trouble us."

"Then why not ride straight forward on our course, and so put a yet larger space between us?"

"I said there was no human being in sight, but there are three smokes, one hereaway, some six miles to the southward; but I do not care much for that, seeing that it is out of our line altogether, and that it seems to me it is from an old night fire that has burned low. Then there is one more right ahead of us, directly in our course. It was burning strong, too, with new wood, by the thickness of the wreaths. It is some four miles off, but I could see neither men nor horses, for the fire is kindled behind a roll of the prairie. But there they are cooking their tortilla, sure enough. Again, there is a great smoke, as of many fires altogether, away here, more than ten miles off, I think, to the northward. So we are in a net, as it were, among their outlying parties. The great smoke to the north, is, I fancy, the camp or head-quarters, or what you will, of Carrera's horse. Those lancers that came so near us in our bivouac, are one of their reconnoitering parties; and these two smokes are two more. They are all on the look-out for me. The scoundrels, from the fire that has burned low, must have breakfasted already, and ridden northward to join the squad on the other side the river, by the fords above Laredo—we had seen them else. Now, as none of these have seen us, or fallen on our trail, it is likely they will make a sweep southward toward the Nueces, and so we may reckon on seeing no more of them."

"You calculate chances closely," said Gordon, who had listened with equal surprise and admiration to the intricate deductions drawn by the Partisan from indications which appeared to him so trivial.

"I must calculate closely, to save you from lance and lasso. Carrera takes no prisoners!" answered Pierre, coolly. "Now there are three plans, of which we must choose one, and then act on it for life or death. We must work twenty miles due north, up this forest land, and so get above all their posts—which were the safest plan of all, if it would not carry us so far out of our route, and bring us far too soon into the settled country, quite out of the line of our communications—or we must strike due southward for that extinguished fire, and so strive to make our way down to our posts at Mier and

Camargo, which would do well enough did not the whole of that country swarm with guerrilleros—or, again, we must drive right onward, and take the chance of falling on the party at the little fire unawares, and finding them so few that we can master them. If we succeed in doing so, we have the best chance of reaching Monterey in safety. For, once through these frontier parties, we shall, it is likely, find the country clear until we reach our outposts."

"The risk of the three, then, is nearly equal," said Gordon, musing deeply.

"The immediate risk of the last is greatest; the ultimate risk the least; but, in truth, it is chance, anyhow."

"Which would you choose were you alone?"

"I would lie by till night, and then pass the center picket. But we cannot do so. We are too strong in numbers to lie *perdu*."

"Which do you recommend?"

"If your sweet lady have nerve to look on bloodshed, and, if need be, to ride for her life afterward—the third."

"Then the third be it," replied Julia, cheerfully. "I take the choice upon myself. I am a soldier's daughter, and the wife of a soldier, and nerve I must have, and will."

"Brave heart!" muttered the Partisan, gazing on her admiringly. "Brave heart! you shall be saved."

Then he advanced again upon the prairie, gazed forth a second time, and, finding that every thing he saw went to confirm his first impression, returned to the dragoons and ordered them quietly to dismount and breakfast on whatever cooked provisions they had with them, neither lighting any fire nor unsaddling their chargers. This done, he rejoined Gordon and his bride, and sitting down with them upon the mossy greensward, in the middle of the horses, produced his slender store, and exhorted them to eat, and ate himself, as tranquilly conversing all the while about indifferent matters, as if there had been no danger within fifty miles of them.

Courage and coolness, like cowardice, are infectious; and Gordon, who, as a brave man and a soldier, feared nothing for himself, whatever he might do for the fair partner of his perils, soon caught the contagion of the Partisan's manner; and Julia, by nature gay and mirthful, soon forgot all but the present moment. In short, that morning meal, snatched in the midst of warlike preparation, almost in length of merciless, unsparing enemies, was enjoyed with a zest such as is given only by novelty and excitement.

Many minutes had not passed, however, before Pierre arose from his seat, bidding his young companions eat heartily, for it was hard to say when they might have the time to eat again—announced that he was going to cross-examine the prisoner, and walked coolly away toward the group of dragoons.

Not one of these men understood a word of Spanish, and Gordon and his wife were too far to distinguish any thing that was said. It was clear, however, by the gesticulation of the Partisan, by the frequent laying of his right hand on the hilt of his knife, and by the motion of his left toward the different fires which he had enumerated, that he was questioning him, not without threats of instant death, as to the numbers and position of the enemy.

It was not long before he came back to Gordon, and desiring him to help the lady to mount, replaced his slender baggage on the back of the good horse Emperor, and then, without setting a foot in the stirrup, laid his hand lightly on the pommel, and vaulted into the saddle.

Still he paused before giving the word to advance, and looked hesitatingly toward Julia, who sat mouthing her thoroughbred palfrey lightly with the curb, perfectly self-possessed and easy in her manner and expression.

"If I could only trust that dog," he said, at length. "But, as they say, *quién sabe?* He tells me that, as I suspect, Carrera is up yonder with thirteen hundred horse. That there are two hundred in the squad we saw this morning. That fifty bivouacked down yonder to the south, and are gone off to join the rest; and that the party right ahead is but a night scout, of six men, under orders to lie by all day, and patrol the ground, between the posts, by night. If this be so, and we can get upon them unperceived, it will be easy work; but not a man or a horse must escape. So bid your dragoons, when they fire, aim at the cattle altogether, and when they charge, ride down the horses, or hamstring them with their swords."

"Do you believe him?" inquired Gordon, anxiously. "He may be leading us into an ambuscade."

"Hardly, I think," replied the Partisan. "In the first place, he knows me, and I have promised him sure death if there be one man more than he has named, and two ounces at night if we get clear through them. The fellow is in mortal terror, for I never pass by him but he starts, as though he felt my knife in his gizzard. But, come; we have no time to lose; let us be moving."

And, without waiting for any further or-

der, they did move, and, having the friendly covert of the forest, they rode out into the open prairie, which stretched away into ridgy waves, like an unbroken sea, for leagues and leagues on every side of them. Not a tree or bush diversified the interminable range, or afforded a spot on which the eye could rest, or by which it could measure distance. Everywhere, the long deep-green grass—for the land on that side of the Bravo is moister and less sterile—waved and twinkled, as it rose and fell before the fresh breath of the northern breeze, gemmed with ten thousand flowers of every various hue.

Far to the northward lay the smokes, not now a single column, but a long line of separate jets streaming away before the wind, toward our company, which indicated the position of the main force of Carrera.

These, as he now surveyed them from his horse's back, Pierre pronounced to be more distant than he deemed at first; asserting that full fifteen miles were interposed between themselves and the enemy in that quarter. To the southward, the fire which he had discovered had burned quite out, and no trace of it was to be discovered; this fact confirming the report of the prisoner, and his own preconceived opinion.

Before them, however, nearer and more distinct at every stride of their horses, rose that round which, if the Mexican spoke truly, the party to be met with and disposed of slept unconscious.

Mile after mile vanished beneath the feet of their horses, as they pressed onward steadily and swiftly: Pierre once again in the van, leading them on, rifle unslung and ready, at Emperor's fast slashing trot.

Now they were within a mile or less of the ridge's brow, steeper and more abrupt than any which they had yet passed, from the other side of which the smoke rose in gray volumes, having been fed with recent fuel. Here, then, Pierre halted, and caused the pack mules to be securely tethered to stakes driven into the moist earth of the prairie bottom, together with the horse of the Mexican.

The prisoner—after being once more interrogated, and persisting in his tale that there were but six men; that there was a large stream at the base of the descent; and that the fire was on this side of the stream—was dismounted, gagged, bound hand and foot, and laid on his back upon the grass.

This done, Gordon arranged his handful of men, himself leading on the right, while Pierre rode forward some six horse-lengths in advance, and Julia, who had refused positively to remain behind with the pack mules, followed a length or two behind. All that she could be prevailed upon to cede was, that she should halt on this side the brow of the hill, when the charge was to be made which was to decide their fate. No man could be spared from their little force to guard her; therefore, reluctantly they were compelled to yield to her will.

Thus they advanced, now at a foot's pace, picking their ground where the soil was softest and the prairie grass longest, that so the sound of their horses' feet might be deadened—with their reins well in hand, their broadswords loosened in their scabbards, and their forefingers on the triggers of their carbines.

Now they were within twenty paces of the extreme brow of the ridge, which alone separated them from their enemy—three paces more would have brought their heads into relief against the sky above the summit of the hill, and discovered them to the sentinel, if there was one, on duty. At this moment, Pierre pulled his horse short up, dismounted silently, and with a gesture to the well-trained and gallant animal, which, it was evident, he understood—for he stood still on the instant, with ear erect, expanded nostril, straining eye, quivering in every limb with fiery eagerness—cast himself down, rifle in hand, among the shorter herbage which clothed the steep ascent.

Up this he wormed his way like a snake, painfully and slowly, keeping his head so low and his body compressed so closely to the ground, that at a hundred yards' distance he was entirely concealed from the keenest eyesight.

Words cannot describe the agony or excitement which made the hearts of the brave, hardy men—much more of the lovely woman, who looked on, mute and inactive spectators of that first attack—throb in their bosoms and swell upward to their very throats, with a fast, sickening motion.

He gained the verge, and stretched his neck forth an instant to look over it. But in the same point of time he couched yet more closely to the earth; and they might see his right hand cautiously draw the trailed rifle forward.

Again his head was thrust forward—he rose half to his knee, and raised the heavy yager, as if it had been a feather, to his shoulder. It was not a second that the piece remained motionless before its contents were sent forth with a bright glaring stream, and a quick, sharp crack from the muzzle; but it seemed to all the spectators as if minutes had elapsed between the leveling and the discharge of the weapon.

No sound followed that crack—no groan—no

cry of anguish—it was indeed a death-shot!—until the heavy tramping of the dragoon horses thundered on the ears of the astonished Mexicans, aroused from their secure slumbers to desperate and fruitless combat.

Swiftly, however, as the dragoons passed up the hill, more swiftly yet did the well-trained charger of the Partisan dash, instantly as he beheld the rifle's flash, into his fleetest gallop. One second brought him to his master's side, another second set that master in the saddle, and ere a third elapsed, he had crossed the brow of the ridge in advance of the dragoons, and with his long straight broadsword flashing above his head, was sweeping unsupported, as it seemed, down upon the enemy.

There were, as the prisoner had stated, six men only; two of whom were awake, the one a sentinel stalking to and fro with his escopeta in his hand, the other, a non-commissioned officer, who sat smoking his cigarillo by the fire, over which a camp-kettle filled with some savory mess was simmering.

The death-shot, which sped its bullet crashing through the brain of the hapless sentinel, aroused them all, and brought them to their feet, amazed and terrified, and unprepared for action. All stood astounded and breathless—all save the sergeant, who, being apparently a quick-witted veteran soldier, as he was evidently a powerful and vigorous man, rushed to the horses as soon as he heard the sound of the coming charge, untethered his own charger, sprung to its back and forced it through a deep and miry ford of the rivulet, even before his men got hold of their weapons, still less thought of their horses.

Meantime, the dragoons crossed the ridge and poured down all abreast, receiving as they came, a straggling volley from the escopetas of the lancers, who, seeing that flight was hopeless, stood to their arms like men, and made a desperate defense. Not a single ball took effect, however; for so fierce and rapid was the charge of the dragoons down the abrupt hillside that the dismounted Mexicans overshot them, and were in their turn all sabered or shot down before they had time to draw a sword, much less to reload their firelocks.

While this was passing, however, the Partisan—who saw at a glance what must be the fate of those opposed to the charge of Gordon's troopers, and that the only thing to be apprehended was the escape of the sergeant—drove Emperor at full speed down the hill, to the right hand of the fire, and rode him straight at the yawning chasm of the rivulet.

Not for a second did the bold beast pause or hesitate, but with his long thin mane and full tail floating out in the strong breeze, with wide-opened eye and blood-red nostril, swept over it with one grand stroke, landed firm as a rock on the further margin and drove on without altering his pace, or swerving from his direct line.

Then came a desperate race, for life or death, across the firm, dry prairie, which echoed under the thundering horse-tramps, firm, solid and elastic.

The Mexican had, perhaps, gained a start of some fifty yards before his foe was across the brook, and his small but high-bred horse, being the fresher of the two, held his own for a little way, and even widened the gap at first, between himself and his pursuer. Ere long, however, the tremendous stride and power of the Anglo-American thoroughbred horse began to tell; and at every stroke, the Partisan closed on him. Nor was the other slow to perceive the disadvantage. He stood up in his stirrups, looked quietly behind him, and seeing that none of the dragoons had passed the brook, but had dismounted and were now grouped about the fire, deliberately pulled his horse up, and, unslinging his escopeta, took a deliberate aim at Pierre Delacroix.

He fired. The ball whizzed through the air, so close to the head of the Partisan, that it severed one of his long, dark locks; but it passed onward harmless. Then, seeing the failure of his missile, the Mexican couched his long lance and rode at the frontiersman with a savage yell.

Silently Pierre charged right upon him; but, when he was within half a horse's length of the spear's point, he wheeled suddenly to the left, and as the Mexican was borne past him, delivered a straight lunge, *en carte*, which emptied his saddle in an instant, and left him but a minute's life to wrestle out on the green-sward.

But the Partisan had no time to give to mercy, or to bestow on the dying man. It was necessary to secure his charger, lest it should bear the tidings of defeat to his countrymen; and, when that was done, and he repassed the spot where the man had fallen, the last strife was over, and the features—all grim and ghastly, and set fast in death—told that all mortal aid was bootless.

Loud went the shout, up to the skies, from the little squad of regulars, as they beheld the issue—though they expected nothing else—that single combat; and warm and grateful were the greetings of Arthur Gordon, as he

rode out alone to meet him in whom all their hopes were centered.

That short but bloody conflict ended, there was naught to detain them any longer there. The lady was led forward in the direction which kept her clear of the fallen corpses, and the bloody ground on which they lay; while the dragoons brought up the prisoner and the mules from the rear.

Meanwhile, the Partisan directed the horses of the slaughtered Mexicans to be securely tethered, since they were useless to their captors, and supplied with abundant forage, easily gathered from the rich bottom. This executed, he caused the bodies of the slain to be composed, as if they were asleep around the watch-fire, with their arms stacked beside them. He heaped fresh fuel on the blaze, enough to last for several hours; and then, looking over the ground carefully before he mounted, he was satisfied that, even if the Mexican horse should pass within a short distance, they would suspect nothing wrong, unless accident should lead them to a close inspection of the post.

Then he rode away to join Gordon and the lady, but, ere he did so, he met the prisoner in charge of the two soldiers who had brought up the mules, and the fellow, looking at him half askance, asked him in Spanish, with a sullen and almost savage intonation, whether he had not told him truly.

Pierre replied only by two words—"Very truly." But he noted the accent and half-sneering smile; and the first words he spoke as he joined the lieutenant, were—"D—n that scoundrel! I have half a mind to reward him with one ounce of lead instead of two of gold."

"That were scarce worthy of you, Partisan," said Gordon, "and scarce worth the time. What harm can one poor devil like that do to six stout, well armed fellows, such as we?"

"I do not know," answered Pierre, "I do not know; but right sure I am, that he is a double traitor."

CHAPTER VI. THE NIGHT ALARM.

ALL day they rode across the open plains, presenting still the same invariable aspect of rich green prairie land, for the most part nearly level, but now very rich and fertile, and becoming more and more so, with every mile our party traversed. Many bright rivulets and sparkling brooks they crossed, each winding through its deep verdant swale, fringed with luxuriant underwood, and overhung with fine timber trees, all overrun with woodbines and creepers still covered with the densest foliage, and many of them in full bloom, notwithstanding the advanced season of the year. One or two large bodies of running water all tributaries of the Bravo, crossed their path; but all save one, which again put the light pontoon in requisition, were passed at fords, through which the lady rode without inconvenience, and to which the Partisan conducted them with the unerring instinct of the North American frontiersman.

The park-like meadows over which they rode, began toward noon—by which hour they had traveled nearly thirty miles from their halting place of the previous night—to be interspersed with open groves of fine trees, with islands, as they are called, of musquite bushes, mingled with bays, wild peaches, and wild myrtles, and here and there with dense thorny thickets of the formidable chaparral, or prickly pear.

Whenever the ground was open, however, it was covered with flowers of ten thousand gorgeous hues, many of them surpassing, both for perfume and beauty, the most lovely of our garden favorites.

The thickets and groves were alive with paroquets and other bright-winged birds.

Large flocks of quail, composed of many broods or bevvies associated, sprung up before the feet of the horses, and skimmed away on rapid wings toward the nearest coverts; and several times small herds of deer, or yet more graceful antelope, were seen bounding across the ridge of some low eminence, and pausing for a moment to gaze at the intruders on their solitude.

The air was pure and clear, as that of a brisk October morning, but as warm withal and as balmy as a summer's day. The sky, overspread with a slight filmy gauze-like haze, showed like a vault of lapis lazuli half seen through a lace curtain, while the great sun, shorn of his else intolerable heat and luster, suffered his glories to be contemplated with an undazzled eye.

No alarm had interrupted their progress—not a sign of man or beast had been observed, since their surprise of the Mexican outpost. Pierre had announced that he considered all danger of pursuit, from any of the parties which they had seen in the morning, to be at an end; and had added further, that they were already so far in the rear of Carrera's force, and his line of operations, that for the present he regarded themselves in almost absolute safety.

Undisturbed, therefore, by any present apprehension, exhilarated by that most exciting of all movements, the swift gallop of a thoroughbred over a velvet lawn, amused by the quaint

speech and singular character of Pierre, and emboldened by the companionship of her young husband, Julia had forgot all the hardships and perils she had gone through, all that she must encounter before she could even hope to reach a place of safety, and gave herself up altogether to the enjoyment of the lovely scenery, the delicious climate, and the exciting speed at which they rode; and declared that she had never been on a party of pleasure one half so delightful.

At noon, they halted for three hours under the shelter of a clump of magnificent oaks over-canopying a little pool, the well-head of as clear a streamlet as ever was the haunt of Grecian wood nymph. The silvan meal was spread with all the simple luxury of a frontiersman's fare; and when the viands were consumed, the leather bottle of the Partisan, not quite exhausted by the assaults of the previous evening, was again called into play and the Indian pipes were lighted, and an hour was whiled away—none ever more agreeably—with many a legend of the chase, the foray, and the fight; many a tale of wild adventure, or rude chivalry, as stirring to the soul as the high feats recorded in the old French of Froissart, or Comines.

And with the legends of the wilderness, and the true tales of border chivalry, were mingled poetry and song; for Julia, frank and unaffected as woman, true woman ever should be, raised her sweet voice at Frank Gordon's first request, in a rich simple melody of ancient days, had called an echo from the astonished genii of the oaks, who listened for the first time, then, to the thrilling sounds of pure English poetry, chanted in a rich full soprano voice, by one who sung not with her lips alone but with her heart, and lived, as it were, in the spirit of her strain.

Pierre listened while she sung, with his eyes fixed upon the greensward at his feet, and the lids drooping over them so far that nothing of their expression could be discerned; but the muscles about his mouth worked and quivered convulsively, and as the last soft cadence died away, and the song was ended, he looked up into the lovely lady's face, and wistfully wiping a tear from either eye, with the back of his hard brown hand.

"You have made me do a thing, lady, I have not done for many a year; nor ever thought to do again. You have made me weep—I don't know what it means—for there was nothing in your words pitiful or affecting, nor were the tones of your voice melancholy. Nor, indeed, do I feel sad, but on the contrary very happy—happier than I have felt for many a day. Yet I weep. I don't know what it means. I should think there were magic in it, did I not know that all such ideas are mere folly. I never felt so in my life before; and, though it is a sweet as well as a strange feeling, I hope never to feel so any more. It cannot be good for a man to feel so—it enervates, it unmans him."

He paused, still gazing in her beautiful innocent face, and then seeing a bright sunny smile yet like an April sunbeam half tearful in its brightness, steal over her face, he said, almost sadly:

"Ah! you laugh at me, lady; you laugh at me; and you do so rightly. When an old woodland bear, such as I, begins to talk about he knows not what, he ought to be laughed at. Nay! nay! don't answer me; but lay you down, rather, on that dry mossy grass, and try to sleep awhile; you have had fatigue enough this morning to weary a veteran soldier, and excitement enough to exhaust a Turenne or a Conde. Try to sleep for an hour or so, while I go and take a round on the prairie. I see a flock of buzzards yonder, whose motives I don't exactly understand, and I would have a nearer look at them. We will not get to horse again for two hours, but then we shall have to ride late. Gordon, if you take my advice, you will try a siesta too; and you, my lads, sleep if you can, without a sentry. There is no danger here-about. Only make that fellow secure, that he may not give us the slip."

And with the word, he took up his rifle, tried it with the ramrod to see that the ball had not fallen out, from the speed at which he had ridden, as the gun hung muzzle downward at his back; renewed the copper caps, loosened his wood-knife in its sheath, and walked off unaccompanied toward the spot in the plain above which a flight of the black vultures, commonly known as turkey buzzards, were hovering and swooping, at a distance so great that they looked no larger than flies, and that no ordinary eye could have distinguished what they were.

As he moved away slowly, Julia's eyes followed his departing figure, and her face wore a very thoughtful expression, as she turned round to her husband.

"There goes an extraordinary man," she said, with an expression of deep feeling. "A very singular, and very noble character. I never have seen and very seldom read of anything like him."

"By Heaven! I believe he is in love with you, Julia," replied Frank Gordon, half laughing, half in earnest. "I have thought so all the morning."

"I trust not," replied the young woman. "I

trust not, indeed; that would be too great a misfortune."

There was no tremor in her manner, nor the slightest blush on her delicate and lovely face. But Gordon observed that she did not contradict his words, nor express an opinion of her own.

"How a misfortune, Julia?" he asked, after a moment's pause; and though his tone was light and bantering as he spoke, his young wife observed, or fancied she observed, something peculiar in his manner. "What do you mean? I thought you pretty ladies ever esteemed it a great honor to have men in love with you, even when you do not care for them, and did your utmost to make them so."

"You speak strangely, Frank," she answered with a slight sad smile. "Whatever heartless women may do, sure am I, that you never saw anything that could indicate such thoughts in me. I said it would be a great misfortune, because it requires no very acute eye to see that such a man as that, if he once loved, must needs love forever; and as I have no love to return, it would be very sad and lamentable. For I can dream of nothing in the whole range of agony and anguish so terrible as unreturned and hopeless love; and when a man with such a character, such energies and such a soul as that loves knowing that he loves hopelessly, it must be as an earthquake in his soul forever."

"Julia, I never heard you speak so warmly or so strongly in all my life before; what does this mean? what influence, what fascination has this man exercised over your mind, which is in general so quiet and self-balanced?"

"The influence and fascination of superior genius; I never met any one the least like him."

"Genius! genius in that rude woodsman—that man hunter and rover of the wilderness! Genius! are you mad, Julia?"

"No, Frank, dear," she replied, with a merry little arch smile—"but you are a little jealous, which is very silly."

"Jealous! jealous of that leather-shirted rough rider! I should as soon think of being jealous of Sergeant Maitland yonder, who is the better looking fellow of the two by odds."

"Better looking!" cried Julia disdainfully. "It seems to me that men are ever thinking about looks—as if women cared a pin how a man looks, provided he looks like a gentleman, without looking like a fool! and as for Pierre Delacroix, take my word for it, if he ever loves a woman whose heart is disengaged, he will prove as dangerous a rival as any man, how handsome or how wise so ever, need desire."

"You speak enthusiastically, madam."

"Madam!" exclaimed the fair girl, mournfully; "madam! and is this to me, Frank? to your own Julia? to me, who has followed you through peril, and into places no woman ever ventured to essay for the love of man before? Oh! Frank, Frank Gordon, is this not ungenerous!"

"I do not know," he replied, still under the influence of some lurking discomposure. "I do not know. But I know this, that I wish you would not give way to such romantic nonsense."

"I am sorry that I have offended you, Frank," she replied, the big tears gushing to her soft blue eyes, as she spoke. "But more sorry yet that you so little understand me. But I am tired with my ride, and will try to sleep. Do so, dear Frank, likewise; you are disturbed, I think, and your blood is heated by all this turmoil and excitement."

"Sleep, Julia, if you can. I am too ill at ease to sleep," answered her husband moodily.

"Ill at ease—are you, indeed, ill at ease, dear Frank?" and as she spoke she drew herself closer to his side, and threw one of her arms across his shoulder, "and have I vexed you? Oh! forgive me, Frank. I did not mean to tease you."

"No! no! 'Tis I who am a fool, Julia," he replied, all his good-humor returning, and he kissed her fair forehead as he spoke. "I am a fool, and you are all that is good and sweet. But I cannot bear, dearest, to hear you speak so warmly of any other man."

"Silly, silly Frank!" she answered, slapping his hand playfully with her small white fingers. "Do not you know that they say jealous husbands make false wives? and that you should not imagine that I could like any man but you?"

"I did not think so, Julia dearest! I did not think so; it was mere waywardness."

"Then be not wayward any more, I pray you; for if you be so often, it will make me miserable."

"I will not, Julia—I will not, by my soul! But lay you down, love, and take some rest. I will watch over you; for, believe me, I am not weary. See, I will fill a fresh pipe and keep guard, for all our poor soldiers are overcome with sleep, already."

He did immediately as he said he would, and having replenished his pipe, and lighted it anew, returned to his place in the shade, and his fair wife, pillowng her head on his knee, and covered with his watch cloak, gazed fondly upward into his face in silence, till the lids waxed heavy and closed over the bright azure orbs, and she slept peacefully and sweetly as a happy infant.

Above an hour elapsed before the Partisan re-

turned, bearing on his shoulders the saddle of a fat buck, which he had shot during his reconnaissance, wrapped in its own hide, and in his right hand, together with his rifle, a long Comanche arrow reddened with dry gore.

He found the whole party sleeping so soundly that he walked into the very midst of them without disturbing one of the number, for Gordon, despite of his assertion that he was in no wise weary, had sunk into a deep slumber leaning against the trunk of the huge oak which overshadowed him, and nothing short of the call to "boot and saddle," would have aroused the dragoons from their death-like sleep.

"Poor things!" said the Partisan, compassionately, as he looked down upon them—"Poor young things! little know they the toils and hardships of a frontier life, when they set forth on such a route as this. But love," he continued, still looking at the sleepers wistfully, "love sweetens and disguises all their toils and perils, and I doubt me if they were happier in the lap of luxury at home than here in the midst of peril and terror. Ah me!" he added, with a deep sigh, uttered he scarce knew wherefore, "Ah me! it must be a sweet thing to be so loved, and by such a woman. But it is one of the sweet things I shall never know—that much is certain. No woman ever loved me, save my mother—and none ever will again in this world. But why should I think of this, since I have chosen my own lot, and by that which I have chosen must abide. But come—come. This will never do. I will saddle their horses, that they may sleep to the latest moment."

He said, or rather thought no more, for though he had murmured articulate words occasionally, he had not uttered a regular soliloquy—but applied himself instantly to his self-appointed duty, collecting the luggage, and saddling his own charger and the horses of his friends. Nor until that was done did he arouse the dragoons, and set them to preparing for the march.

The bustle of their movements soon aroused first Julia and then Gordon, and in a few minutes the whole party were again in the saddle, and in motion toward the spot where the already westering sun seemed to be tending across the rolling plains, which seemed at every step of their horses to grow richer and more luxuriant, and to be intersected at briefer intervals by rivulets and forked dingles.

For a short space the party rode in silence; but at length Gordon broke it by inquiring whether Pierre had discovered the meaning of the vultures' movements. He had scarcely spoken, before he saw, by the expression of the Partisan's face, that he had committed an error; but it was too late to remedy it, and the Partisan, seeing that Julia's eyes were turned toward him, answered coolly, though with a meaning glance addressed to the inquirer:

"They were about the carcase of a dying elk, which they dared not attack until the life was quite extinct. He had been shot yesterday or the day before by a Comanche whose arrow I found sticking in his ribs."

"How can you tell that it was so long since the poor animal was wounded?" inquired Julia, turning rather pale, as she heard the mention made of these ferocious savages. "How do you know that we are not close among the Indians?"

"By many marks, lady," replied the Partisan, "which you would not comprehend, even were I to describe them to you. But by these above all—that the blood was quite dry on the arrow and about the wound; that the animal had run many miles after he was shot, as any one could see from the different colored mud with which his hide was splashed; and that he had lain where I had found him many hours."

"How could you discover that? Your instinctive knowledge seems to me to be almost supernatural."

"Nothing more easily, lady. The poor brute was unable to rise, and had crooked all the pasture in a circle as far as he could reach in every direction. To one who notices the works of the great Master closely, no one of them but has a meaning and a voice. Let us, however, gallop forward; for I desire to reach a spot I know well, ere nightfall."

Nothing of consequence occurred during their onward route. No signs of men or horses disturbed their hopes of a peaceful progress, and before the earliest stars had gained their full intensity of luster in the darkening firmament, they reached the halting place.

It was a little dell or basin, not overhung with large trees, but surrounded on all sides by low abrupt banks, covered with impenetrable thickets of the prickly pear, and having but one entrance by which either man or horse could gain admittance into the small grassy amphitheater which they inclosed. That entrance was the gorge formed by the streamlet which welled up suddenly from a large clear spring-head in the center of the basin; and so narrow was the gorge, and so thickly were the slopes on either hand set with the thorny brakes, that even no other means of entering presented itself but by riding up the mid channel of the gravelly stream, almost belly deep in water. Once within this fortress, the travelers appeared to be in a state of perfect security, and capable almost of stand-

ing a siege, so long as provender and ammunition should hold out; but no thoughts of this nature occurred to their minds—nor did they anticipate the slightest disturbance during the night.

Fires were lighted, supper cooked and discussed, and then, as before, all lay them calmly down to their night's repose, the lady under the shelter of her small pavilion, the rest on the greensward around her, the horses being picketed securely, and the Mexican prisoner bound to the left arm of the sergeant, who was the strongest man of the party, by his own right arm, while his left was made fast to his side by a stout surcingle.

For many hours, not a sound was heard in the neighborhood of the little encampment. The moon rose and soared above it in her silver beauty, and bathed everything for miles and miles around in soft luster—the stars rose and set—and the first gray ray of morning was just beginning to pale the eastern horizon, when a deep, continuous, hollow sound, like the roar of the distant surf, aroused every one in an instant.

"Indians! it is Indians!" exclaimed Gordon. "Stand to the horses, lads. Strike the tent like lightning. If one of the beasts neighs or stirs, we are lost!"

Three of the dragoons, who had risen to their feet on the first alarm, obeyed his orders in an instant, as regarded the horses; Gordon himself struck the tent, and in deep silence, speechless and almost breathless, they awaited the result.

Nearer and nearer drew the din. Gordon was right; it was the fast falling tramp of unshodden horse-hoofs. Five minutes, or less, after the first alarm, the mounted horde swept by the mouth of the gorge, so near that the travelers could see their shaven and plumed scalps, their easy martial seats on their wild horses, and their long lances in relief against the sky. But the darkness which brooded over the little basin protected them, and almost as soon as it was there, the danger had passed over.

But as it ended, and men had time to look around them, it was perceived at once that one of their number—Pierre, the Partisan—was missing, and that the sergeant, although that din might have aroused the dead, still lay asleep on the greensward.

Asleep, indeed! in that sleep which knows no waking. Three deep knife-wounds in his bosom, his throat cut from ear to ear, the cords severed which had bound him to the prisoner—these suffice to tell the tale.

But the Mexican and the sergeant's charger had vanished, and the Partisan and brown Emperor were absent.

Horror, and a sense near akin to despair, fell on the party thus abandoned. For a little while they gazed in each other's faces, mute and white with surprise, if not with terror. Gordon was the first to recover from his consternation, and he spoke cheeringly:

"The prisoner has escaped, and the Partisan has gone in pursuit of him, that is clear," he said. "We have nothing to do but to wait here until he returns. We have food in abundance; and water and forage for the horses, and we can keep this pass against all the Indians in the universe, so long as our ammunition lasts—and we can fire five hundred rounds, if the Comanches find us out, which I think they will not. Keep good heart, therefore, men, and trust me, Pierre Delacroix will be back here before sunset."

"But the Comanches! have not they cut him off?" whispered Julia, who had not spoken one word since the first alarm, but had behaved with the cool, passive fortitude of a brave, noble woman, awaiting the end in silent resignation.

"Surely not," replied Gordon confidently. "Had they fallen in with him, his brave horse would surely have outstripped them, and in his flight he would surely have led them in a contrary direction from this, our stronghold."

"Surely he would! You are right! you are right!" said the quick-witted girl—"God's name be praised; you are right, Frank; he is safe!"

"And will be here among us before the sun shall set, which is now on the point of rising," was his cheerful answer.

CHAPTER VII. THE BELEAGUERED CAMP.

The day dawned calm and clear, the skies were pure and cloudless, the atmosphere soft, balmy, and delicious, and the light air laden with a thousand odors gathered from the dew-besprent flowers of the rich prairie land around them. No sound disturbed the stillness of those vast solitudes, except the rippling music of the little rill, trickling over the yellow pebbles with its swift glancing current.

The night had been one of anxiety and sleeplessness to all—to Julia of unmixed apprehension, if not terror. From the moment in which the wild horde of the North American desert had swept like a tornado past the gorge of the small basin which sheltered them, not a breath of the delicious night breeze but seemed to bear to her ears the clatter of returning horse-hoofs, and the yell of the exulting savages. Nor was their position indeed other than that of extreme perplexity and peril. Tracked, as they had every reason to believe themselves, by the blood-thirsty lancers of Carrera, whom their lately

escaped captive would surely conduct to their hiding-place; deprived of the trusty guide and gallant soldier, in whom their only hope was centered, and now surrounded by roaming bands of the bravest, fiercest, and most warlike tribe of Indians in the world, there was indeed ample cause why bold men should almost tremble, why woman should almost despair.

No further alarm, however, had followed the passage of the wild Comanches, and, save the melancholy cry of a distant owl from one of the many woodland isles which dotted the expanse of the open prairie no sound had reached the ears of the anxious watchers. The moon had set soon after the alarm was given, and thereafter the little party had remained in utter darkness, for the camp-fires had been instantly extinguished, except the faint glimmering of the stars which were momentarily paling in the heavens. Gradually, as the feeble light of the increasing dawn began to creep up from the eastern horizon and to spread its pale, grayish hues over the boundless plains, the anxiety of the little party grew almost into agony.

That feeble twilight, which was so slowly waxing into day, was to be the harbinger to them of escape, of safety, or of despairing strife, captivity and outrage.

Eager and penetrating eyes were strained to pierce the deceptive misty haze, half light, half darkness, which brooded over the level champaign, long before it was possible to distinguish objects at a distance of more than two hundred paces.

An hour passed away, and the skies grew brighter apace and brighter, and then the sun heaved the rim of his great blood-red disk above the waving line which formed the low horizon; and the lurid rust-colored rays streamed long and level over the undulating plains, tipping the ridge of every billowy swell with ruddy gold, and leaving the long hollows filled with soft purplish shadows. And still the eye could discern nothing accurate or certain whereby to judge of the presence or absence of their wily and insidious foes. Several times one or other of the party pointed out here and there, streaming up from the wide landscape, columns of pure white vapor, which were pronounced confidently to be the smokes of Indian campfires, until, one after another they melted away under the increasing warmth of the morning sun, and proved to be no more than exhalations from some stagnant pool or solitary well-head in the boundless waste. At length the sun had attained such an altitude that all the clay and surface of the land for many a league around, with the exception of the basins of some two or three deeper valleys, could be surveyed with ease from the summit of the low knolls which surrounded the small amphitheater; and as soon as this was the case, Arthur Gordon mounted the crest of the highest elevation, carefully keeping his figure backed by the low trees and thorny underwood which clothed the hill, and swept the whole panorama with a powerful telescope. The open country, which he surveyed the first and with the most care, he soon discovered to be free and unguarded. There was no sign of man or his works, and, what was a yet surer proof that he was not in the immediate neighborhood, at many different points of the landscape the young soldier discovered herds of the various wild animals which inhabit those great plains, pasturing or disporting themselves in quiet security.

About a thousand head of wild cattle were in sight, feeding here and there in detached groups, or lying on the dewy grass chewing the cud, undisturbed and fearless. One great herd of wild horses, not numbering less than two hundred, were leisurely traversing a distant headland, and two other little parties, one consisting only of four animals, among which was conspicuous the far-famed white horse of the prairies, were feeding nearer to the foreground of the picture. Besides these, several gangs of elk, the noblest and most splendid of all the denizens of the Western wilderness, and countless groups of deer and antelopes dotted the grassy plains, all evidently unconscious of the vicinity of man. Satisfied thus far, Gordon turned his glass toward the numerous belts and clumps of timber which studded the whole face of the country, but with far less success, and to no satisfaction. The shadow of the past night still hung, as if it were reluctant to depart, in these umbrageous haunts, into which, even at midday, the sunbeams penetrate only with an uncertain and interrupted luster.

His utmost exertion of eye, aided by the powerful glass which had so often done him good service in the field, here availed him nothing; and he was many times in doubt whether, among the dense chaparral and between the thickest stems of the trees, he did not catch fleeting glimpses of the untamed steeds and tawny figures of the dreaded savage. Imagination also was at work; and often when in truth it was but a stray sunbeam, which had lost its way among the thick green leaves, and was glinted back by some silvan lakelet, he saw the flashing fire of a Comanche camp, and almost pictured to himself the forms of the swart barbarians about the ruddy embers. By degrees, however, he discovered that these

things were but the creation of fast-coining fancy; and he became tolerably well assured that nothing of human shape or mien had as yet met his eye. Still he could not be satisfied that the dreaded enemy might not be lurking within half a mile of his encampment—nay, that they might not be perfectly aware of his own whereabouts and numbers, and awaiting for the moment of his moving to set upon him at advantage. His heart was, notwithstanding, somewhat lighter, and his features had a less care-worn expression as he closed the glass and descended the eminence to join his fair young wife, who waited his arrival with indescribable anxiety, although she had sufficient self-control and courage to keep a cheerful face and firm demeanor.

"Well, Julia," he exclaimed, as he came near to join her, "we may rest tranquil for the present, God be thanked! There are no Indians in sight on the prairie, and I have surveyed it for leagues on leagues around; nor is there any signs of our Mexican pursuers."

"But what of the Partisan?" cried the fair girl, eagerly. "Can you see nothing that gives note of him or of his coming?"

"Nothing. Indeed, there are many signs to show that there is no human being within miles, except ourselves, unless he be concealed as cunningly as we are. The plains are alive with elk, and deer, and wild cattle; and there are several herds of wild horses in full view, roaming about secure and fearless."

"That is bad news, indeed," she answered, gravely, and her countenance fell as she spoke. "Alas! I fear he has been taken by those fearful savages—"

"I trust not," replied Arthur, "and, what is more, I think not. For, had they made a prisoner of one so famous, and so formidable to them, as the Partisan, they would have halted on the spot to hold their barbarous orgies. He is too wary and too wise to be entrapped so easily."

"But if he be not, wherefore should he tarry, when he must know how desperate is our position, how terrible must be our anxiety?"

"A hundred things may have occurred to hinder his return. The savages may be interposed between him and the camp; the Mexican runagate, of whom he is in pursuit, may have led him so far astray that he could not return. In a word, Julia, now that the day has fairly broken, I do not look for him before night is again dark over the prairie; with enemies about every side, he is not like to stir abroad by daylight."

"You do not know him, Arthur," she replied, quickly, a bright, enthusiastic gleam kindling within her soft blue eye. "That man would risk a thousand foes fearless, ere he would leave a woman in distress and danger. You do not know him, Arthur."

"I do know him, Julia, and judge of him even as you do, though perhaps," he added, with a smile, "a little more soberly and coolly. The Partisan is certain, as certain as if he saw us now, that we have not quitted this hiding-place, and that we shall not quit it until we may do so with good hope of moving unmolested; and, should he ride hitherward in open day, and be detected doing so, his coming would bring us ruin and not safety."

"And what will you do now, Arthur?"

"Stay where we are till midnight; then, if he have not joined us, make our way by the compass toward Monterey, and trust to God and our good swords for our safety. Cheer up, beloved one, I have been in a worse plight than this ere now, though never with so sweet a comrade. For we have food in plenty, and good horses, and stout hearts, and strong arms to defend us."

"Nay, I am not afraid," she answered, with a faint smile, "not much afraid, I mean, though I believe the danger is very great; but I am with you, Arthur, and that is something always; and live or die, at least we shall live or die together. Great God!" she added, turning her beautiful eyes upward, "how great would be my agony, were I at home in luxury and safety, and knew that you were thus, Arthur."

"I would that you were—I would to God that you were at home and in safety, Julia; and I, if need, were even in a worse plight than this. My heart would be lighter, though perhaps my arm would be weaker than it is now, with your sweet, calm courage kindling me to exertion. But come, dearest; let us go down into the camp. I will post a sentinel on yon hillock, and then we will pass the day as easily as we can. You had better get some sleep if you can, after breakfast, and I and my fellows will lay poor Sergeant Davis in the earth, which, if it be not consecrated, will at least shield him from the ravening wolf and the loathsome vulture."

"I will assist! I will assist, too, Gordon," she replied, her soft azure eyes filling with tears. "Poor Davis! poor, poor fellow! He was as brave as his own good sword, and so kind and gentle ever in his bearing toward me. I have often caught him gazing at me when he thought I marked him not, as though he pitied me."

"He pitied, but admired more, my Julia. He was a man above his station—a man of worth and education, before he entered the ranks, and

in any service but ours, in which it seems that to be gallant and a veteran soldier is a bar to promotion, he would have long since fought his way to a commission. He won the triple chevrons on the disastrous field of Okuchobee, and has been the foremost in every charge from that day until now. Him shall the bugle never stir again to deeds of daring; but his name will live long in the memory of his comrades—of his superiors, and the soldier's best epitaph will be his—'He died in his duty.'

"Ah," replied Julia, with a sigh, "is it the fate of nations in all ages to be thankless and ungrateful?"

"The fate of free nations!" answered Arthur Gordon. "The most free, the least grateful. Tyrants may be capricious. People are selfish. Those reward gorgeously and punish cruelly; these neglect virtues, yet do not pardon vices. But men who serve their country best, serve not for guerdon, nor yet for glory, but for love, conscience, duty."

"A hero's speech!" cried Julia, laughing aloud, and inspired by the eager and excited tone in which he spoke. "May the high speech be parent to the high achievement, and that to the high renown."

"Beautiful prophetess!" he answered, gazing at her fondly. "This, at the least, is certain, there would be more heroes if there were more Julias. But come," he continued, "a truce to sentiment and glory, and let us see if we cannot fare daintily, even though our camp be beleaguered."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOLDIER'S FUNERAL.

In spite of every effort of the young dragoon, the morning meal passed silently and sadly; he could not for his life sufficiently abstract his mind from the consideration of the perils which environed not only himself, but her whom he so dearly loved, to maintain the conversation, which he set on foot several times, only as it would seem to flag as soon as it was commenced.

And she whom he would have diverted, could he have commanded his own soul from the gloomy thoughts in which she was plunged, sat motionless and pale as statuary marble; and though a faint glow would enkindle her white cheek for a moment, and a transient smile lit across her quivering lip, as the voice she loved to hear addressed her with words of cheerfulness and comfort, she relapsed almost immediately into gloomy silence, and seemed to be unconscious of all that was passing around her. The simple viands to which yesterday the Spartan sauce of healthful hunger had lent a flavor so agreeable, now lay before her untouched or distasteful, and it was only by an effort that she compelled herself to swallow the coffee which Gordon pressed upon her as a necessary stimulant, even if it was not a refreshment. It was perhaps a relief to both when the breakfast was ended; and Julia, worn out with the watching and alarm of the past night, coupled with the fatigue of so many days passed in the saddle, tried to procure rest in the shelter of the little tent, which had been pitched in the most secret nook of their silvan amphitheater. Then turning to the performance of his active duties, as much, perhaps, to divert his own mind from anxious and painful reflections, as that those duties were of any great real moment or utility, the youthful soldier once more ascended the eminence on which his sentinel was posted, and carefully surveyed the country round his halting-place. The sun had now gained so much elevation that the morning mists were altogether dispersed, and his broad rays were poured down far and near over the whole expanse of grassy plain and leafy forest.

No signs, however, were to be discovered, from the furthest horizon to the near foreground, of anything like humanity, and when Arthur Gordon came down from his watch-post he did so in the full conviction that no immediate danger threatened him, nor would he have hesitated about setting forth on his march, but for the absence of the Partisan, whose return he still confidently looked for.

He had determined, happen what might, to wait patiently until the shades of night should fall, and the day was to be consumed by some means or other. One duty there was, which might in truth be deemed imperative—the consigning to its last resting-place of their gallant comrade's body, and to this, leaving one of the dragoons on the hill-top to guard against surprise, he applied himself in the first instance. The sabers of his dragoons, and an ax or two, which had been brought with them as a part of the camp equipments, sufficed to scoop out a little hollow in the rich soil of the moist basin, hard by the streamlet's bed, and in it, wrapped in his watch-cloak, with his plumed shako on his head, and his good sword on his thigh, all that was earthly of the gallant veteran was laid to take its long last sleep, that sleep which knows no earthly waking. There was in that sad ceremony none of the proud yet melancholy pomp which marks the soldier's funeral—no dead march pealing solemnly from the wild bugle and muffled drum—no slow and hollow tramp of the grave escort,

following with dark war-worn features and reversed arms the coffin—no charger led along with mourning trappings—no sword and helm and gauntlet displayed on the coffin's lid—no, there was none of these. But truer and sincerer was the tribute paid by the faltering voice of the commanding officer, as he read in the earnest, subdued tones of real feeling the touching ritual of the church of England, and by the heavy tears that fell from the eyes of the two brawny soldiers, who having dug his grave and laid him in the bosom of his mother earth, leaned on their carbines, gazing down upon his grim and ghastly features, well knowing that his fate might be their own ere nightfall.

The heart of Arthur Gordon was stirred to its utmost depths; strange thoughts, half sad and half sublime, crowded upon his spirit, and all that there was of sentiment and romance within him—and there is some within the soul of every human being, however slow or stolid—was awakened, and he read those thrilling sentences from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians with a vigor and enunciation, an eloquence of tone, and an inspiration of manner, which startled his rough listeners and called forth perceptions in their souls of which they had lived hitherto unconscious. So high did his accents rise, and so strangely did they ring in that wild solitude, which surely had never before known its echoes awakened by the sounds of the gospel truth, that the sentinel on the little hill turned his eyes from the country, to watch which he was posted there, and stood gazing down with moist eyes and a full heart upon the solemn group gathered around the sergeant's grave.

Julia, too, awakened from her light and restless slumbers by the raised tones of her young husband's voice, had come forth from her tent, and stood beside the reader, in her snow-white dress, with her long chestnut ringlets floating disorderly on the soft morning air, too bright and beautiful a being to belong to so rude a party, to be mingled in so strange a scene. "Behold," cried the young dragoon, his voice rising more and more emphatically with the rising sublimity of his subject, "Behold, I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound—" But scarcely had the words passed his lips, when he started as if he had received a blow, nor he alone but every one of those who stood about the grave, and Julia even uttered a faint cry, and gazed on the face of the dead man in horrid uncertainty, as if she expected to see him start from the members of the grave. For, at the very moment when Arthur Gordon uttered the word, the long shrill note of a bugle, clearly and powerfully winded, rose upon the morning air, as it seemed close beside them. It was the first impression of the young officer that the lugger of his party, struck by the coincidence of the fine passage with his own profession, and carried away by his feelings, had ventured upon this singular accompaniment, and he was on the point of rebuking him sternly for his unmilitary conduct, when the astonished air of the man and the absence of the instrument satisfied him that he must seek another cause for the interruption. One glance at the sentinel satisfied him. For, aroused by the bugle call to a recollection of his neglected duty, the man had turned around to reconnoiter the prairie in the rear of the low hills, and had instantly crouched down among the underwood to avoid being discovered, as he had been ordered to do in case of the appearance of an enemy. Motioning to his men that they should remain at ease, Arthur Gordon bounded at ten springs to the soldier's side, and saw a sight which for the moment made his bold heart stand still. A troop of Mexican lancers, splendidly equipped and well mounted, although on undersized horses, had emerged from the nearest point of forest land, and marching onward silently, over the deep greensward of the prairie, were now actually wheeling round the outer base of the low hill on which they stood, and which alone concealed his party from their view.

They were sixty in number, dressed in green uniforms with crimson facings, and crimson trousers richly laced, and slouched hats with gaudy bands and gorgeous plumes fluttering in the air as did the crimson banderols of their glittering lances.

Two officers, gallantly equipped, and bestriding animals vastly superior to the chargers of the men, rode at the head of the troop, with their eyes fixed upon the ground, endeavoring, as Gordon speedily discovered, to trace the hoof-marks of his own horses in the moist greensward. The young officer's heart beat fast and thick, and he positively trembled with the violence of his excitement, of his apprehension. He doubted not that all was lost, and that another moment would see the cruel and licentious sons of the fierce Spaniard the masters of his own, of his sweet Julia's destiny. Wild thoughts and wicked whirled madly for the moment through his distracted brain, and as he thought of the utter hopelessness of strife or resistance, as he recalled to mind the dread tales he had heard of torture, and outrage worse than torture wrought on defenseless women by the execu-

rated Mexicans, he grasped the butts of his pistols, half resolved to save himself and her whom he loved far above himself, from that extremity of evil, by kindly murder and self-immolation. Well was it for them both, however, that he paused ere he accomplished his dread determination, for just as he turned on his heel to rush down into the valley where his fair wife stood in mute consternation, the officers in advance pulled in their horses abruptly, and the word was passed to halt so suddenly that the troop was thrown into some confusion, the front ranks halting instantly, and those in the rear pressing tumultuously to the front, ere they could check their small but spirited horses. They had come, it appeared, upon the broad track left on the plain by the headlong passage of the wild Comanches, and as through a singular piece of good fortune, the point at which the savages had leaped the little rivulet was the same at which the dragoons had entered it and ridden upward into the basin where it rose, the tracks of the two parties were completely mixed up and confounded. It was evident that the Mexican lancers were much disturbed and alarmed by the certainty, which they perceived at a glance that they were in the close vicinity of the dreaded Comanches, those Ishmaelites of the western wilderness. Their ranks were hastily re-formed, their escopetas were unslung, the primings inspected, the swords loosened in their scabbards, and everything made ready for immediate action. "Our march has been useless," said the captain of the troop to his lieutenant, in their own tongue; "the savages have taken them—that is plain enough."

"Not useless, thanks be to God," returned the other, "for we have learned their fate, at least; and little matters it to us how the accursed Yankees perish, so they do perish. Carrera will be well pleased, captain, to learn that they are all cut off without loss to our brave fellows; for, though they were but five, they would have fought like incarnate devils, and cost us half a dozen empty saddles at the least." "True, true!" replied the captain, hastily; "but we are not so safe ourselves. These cursed savages are in sight and hearing of us, even now, it is like enough. I should not wonder if they were lurking in this chaparral, on the hillsides here, at this moment." A bright thought flashed upon the mind of Gordon, at this juncture; and well knowing the terror which the Mexicans entertained for the wild rovers, he determined to act upon it on the instant. Among some other curiosities and trinkets which had been picked up in the course of their march, there was a powerful Indian bow, and a quiver full of long well-feathered arrows; and, to bring these up from the camp, he instantly dispatched the soldier who was crouching by his side. In the meantime, the conversation between the Spanish officers continued in rapid and eager sentences.

"How far is the main-guard behind us?" asked the commander of the party, hastily, of a trooper who rode up from the rear.

"About a league, Señor Captain," replied the man, saluting as he spoke.

"Take a sergeant's guard, and ride back for your life!" returned the doughty commander, "and inform the colonel that a strong force of Comanches is close before us, and that we are in momentary expectation of attack!"

A small group was detached from the troop, and away they went at the top of their speed now lost to view as they dashed down some long declivity, now glancing on the eye as they toiled up some rolling swell of the green prairie—their active little horses spurning the sod high into the air behind their rapid hoofs, and their plumes and banderols streaming out in the current of air, created by their own swift motion.

"Were it not well, captain, to let all the bugles sound the alarm? It may be they would hear them, and spur on at once."

"More like the savages would hear and understand them, and so fall upon us ere the succor should come up."

"They would scarcely dare, captain, to attack so strong a force as ours," interposed the cornet, who appeared to possess something more of spirit than his companions.

"Not dare! They dare anything, the accursed devils!" replied the leader. "And, as for strength, they cannot be less than forty in number, by these hoof-tracks."

"But they have no fire-arms."

"Tush! a Comanche arrow will carry further and kill more surely than the ball of an escopeta," returned the captain, sharply. "You have seen nothing as yet, I believe, of these Indians, Cornet Valdiz?"

Little he thought, as he spoke, that his own words were destined to be made good on his own person: yet so, in truth, it was. For, ere the sounds had yet died upon his lips, an arrow whistled from the bow which Gordon drew to its utmost tension, as he lay hidden in the thorny brake, scarce twenty paces distant; and striking the unhappy Mexican full in the breast, pierced him through and through, and fairly came out at his back, literally reeking with his life-blood. A wild and thrilling yell followed, a mean imitation of the Comanche war cry; for so long had the young dragoon waited,

south-western frontier, that the war cries, and even the language of many of the Indian tribes were nearly as familiar to him as his native tongue. Another and another, and another shaft succeeded, so rapidly did he notch them on the tough sinew, and discharge them. But he shot no longer with the deliberate aim and fatal execution of the first arrow, and death no longer followed the twang of the quick drawn bow-string. Still two of the three arrows, though discharged almost at random, found a mark, as they fell in the midst of the serried ranks, and a man and a horse were wounded. No more was needed: without waiting for any word or signal, the lancers turned their reins, set spurs to the horses, and galloped off as hard as they could ride—their officers yielding at first to the panic, and leaving their commander writhing in his death pangs on the gory sod.

Still Gordon whooped and yelled from his covert, and shot arrow after arrow into their receding ranks, until his quiver was nearly empty, and he had seen that the last shaft fell short of the enemy. This they, too, now perceived; and, after some little effort of the officers, the troop was halted, rallied, and reformed, with its front facing the low hills which held, as they supposed, the fierce and murderous savages. Then, at a word, they leveled their escopetas, and the first rank poured in a volley, not a bullet of which so much as fell among the underwood by which Gordon was sheltered from their view. Breaking off from the center, right and left, the front rank now wheeled at quick time to the rear, and the second rank in its turn fired and wheeled off, the third following its example. And so they continued working, continually increasing their distance from the dangerous covert, until they had actually discharged twelve rounds each man, not a single ball of which but had fallen short of the supposed ambush of the enemy. Then, finding that they were unpursued, and that no missiles were directed against them from the underwood, they stood firm; and eagerly reflecting that, if their fire had failed to provoke an attack from the savages, their bugles would probably have no more effect, while they might possibly stir up their lagging countrymen to increased exertion, they made the plains and woods re-echo, for miles around, with the long flourishes of their wind instruments. Scarcely had the brazen clangor subsided into silence, before it was taken up and repeated in the remote distance, by an answering flourish, and the head of a heavy column of cavalry, apparently some hundreds strong, was seen emerging from the forest, at three or four miles distance to the eastward.

As he beheld this demonstration, the heart of Gordon began once more to beat thick and painfully, and he doubted the wisdom of the ruse, which he had practiced in order to drive the intrusive Mexicans from too close a neighborhood to his own quarters. For now that he saw the powerful body which was moving steadily forward to rejoin their advanced party, judging from experience, and from the consideration of what would be his own conduct at the head of such a force, with a mere handful of marauding savages before him, he felt assured that, so soon as the regiment should come up, his position would be attacked in form, and his successful ruse discovered. Indeed, so strong was his conviction of the certainty of this termination, that had it been possible for him to extricate himself from the amphitheater which he occupied, without issuing on the plain directly in the face of the lancers, he would unhesitatingly have evacuated his camp, abandoned his baggage, and made the best of his way toward the forest-land which closed the view of the horizon to the westward. As it was, however, no such option was given him, and he had no alternate but to remain *perdu* where he was, in the hope that the cowardice and imbecility of the Mexican leaders might deter them from attacking a position which certainly, if manned by riflemen, or even by the archery of the Comanches, would have offered some difficulties to the attack of cavalry so dense and thorny was the brake which covered the low hills. He descended, therefore, from his post, charging the sentinel, whom he left behind on the verge of the knoll, to keep a good look-out; and, after telling the two troopers in the hollow that the danger of discovery was at an end for the present, and desiring them to cover the grave of their comrade, and to surround it with an abatis of branches, in order to prevent the wolves from dragging forth the miserable relics of humanity, passed into the little tent to console the lovely girl who was waiting his return, breathless and pale, but wonderfully self-composed and patient. Not many minutes was he permitted to remain in that sweet companionship; for, before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, one of the dragoons thrust his head through the opening canvas wall, and gave his officer notice that the sentinel on the hill was making signals that something was in process on the plain below. "I will return in an instant, dearest," he exclaimed, "or at least will send you word what is happening. Go of good cheer, for in truth I think there is little dan-

ger. These Dem, I fancy, will scarcely try another Indian arrow."

He clasped her to his heart, pressed one long kiss on her pure lips, and rushed forth, half maddened between the excitement of the soldier and the apprehension of the man and lover. A moment brought him to the signal post, this time accompanied by the old soldier whom he had appointed sergeant in the room of the deceased; and, as he cast his eyes upon the landscape, a sight met them which made his blood at first stagnate in his veins with horror, and then thrill fiercely with returning hope of safety.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMBAT ON THE PLAIN.

It was now eleven o'clock in the morning, and not a vestige of cloud was to be discovered in the clear blue firmament, nor a fleece of vaporous mist over any portion of the fair wide landscape. At the moment when Gordon reached his post of observation, the troop of lancers had changed their face, and taken up a new position, some forty or fifty yards further off, on a line oblique to that on which they had previously been drawn up. The cause of this change was evident at a glance, for directly in front of the advanced troop, and coming down at the full speed of their wild horses, filling the air with their savage whoops and yells, was a band of savages, in full war array, and evidently bent on an immediate attack. The numbers of the two parties were nearly equal, although the Mexicans were, if anything, rather stronger; and although the advantage of arms was in favor of the troopers, the Comanches carrying no firelocks, it was still more than doubtful whether the extraordinary skill of the latter, with the bow and arrow, would not more than counterbalance the mere superiority of numbers. The Mexican lancers, indeed, stood their ground firmly, and reserved their fire steadily enough, until within a hundred yards of their front; but, notwithstanding the good face they showed, it was very evident to the young dragoon that, had it not been for the vicinity of their reinforcements, they would not have abided the brunt of the Indian onset.

At this moment, the bugle of the Mexicans gave the signal to commence firing, and a bright flash of flame ran rapidly along the front of the lancers, who, under the cover of the smoke, opened from the center, as before, and wheeled off, right and left, to the rear in order to reload. The effect of the volley, however, was less than insignificant, for not only not a single saddle of the Comanches was emptied, but not a sign of wavering or flinching was visible among the wild warriors. On the contrary, they urged their horses to yet fiercer speed, brandishing their long spears in the air, and notching their arrows to the string, as they rode at full speed.

Suddenly, with a fearful and appalling yell, they launched a cloud of long barbed cloth-yard shafts into the center of the Mexicans. In the instant, all was confusion and disarray. A dozen men went down—some transfixed by three or four several arrows, shrieking and writhing in intolerable anguish; many others were wounded more or less severely, and half a score of horses, pierced by the keen-barbed points, and goaded into madness, bolted, and plunged, and jerked out their armed heels against their fallen masters, against their own companions, all frantic and ungovernable. Still, however, the semblance of discipline was maintained; the front rank closed up, shoulder to shoulder, as they best might, over the dead and dying, and steadily reserved their fire, obedient to the command of their officers, who, to do them justice, did their duty, at this crisis, soldierly and well. Disappointed, as it would seem, by the unexpected coolness on the part of their enemies, the savages wheeled off and dispersed like a flock of wild fowl, each warrior acting as it were independently, whirling around the troopers at full speed, yelling and howling hideously, and evidently waiting only for a moment of unsteadiness to break in bodily upon the troop, and bring it to a hand-to-hand encounter.

At this juncture the main body of horse, which, had it continued to advance, as was its evident duty, would ere this, have been in action, slackened its pace, and finally came to a halt, pushing forward a party of a dozen of men, as if to reconnoiter, and throwing out small detachments on all sides to beat the neighboring coverts, as if they were afraid of being drawn into an ambush. This strange and inexplicable piece of cowardice, while it palpably depressed and chilled the spirits of the lancers, gave new courage to the savages, who once more collected themselves into a single squad, and appeared to be on the point of charging. Before it came to this, however, the captain of the lancers called out one, probably, of his best men, and sent him off, from his rear, toward the main body, with the intention, evidently, of calling for immediate succor. No sooner did the savages perceive this maneuver, than half a dozen of them dashed off at full speed, and whirling round the right flank of the troopers, between them and the wooded hillocks, under a smart running fire, to which they did not give the slightest heed, lashed their wild mustangs

furiously along in pursuit of the headlong messenger. So nearly did they pass to Arthur Gordon's hiding place, that he could distinguish the colors of their war paint, the wavings of the eagle feathers which adorned their scalplocks, and the very features of the individual savages. It was a strangely thrilling sight to mark the incidents of that tremendous race. The Mexican, knowing that he was pursued, and well aware that to be overtaken was to die, spurred on for life—for life—while, hot for blood, and a thirst for plunder, the furious savages yelled frantically, and shot their arrows after him, as they rode at full speed. For a while the soldier appeared to gain on the Indians; and it appeared probable that he would succeed in making good his escape to his countrymen, the advanced squad of whom were hurrying forward to meet him. But just as he had looked behind him, measuring his distance from the enemy, with a watchful and anxious eye, and satisfied of his safety, had set up a shout of exultation, an arrow, drawn to the head, was shot after him, by a practiced hand, from a tough bow. It whistled through the air with an ominous and fearful sound, and took effect on the lancer's horse in the hollow behind the ribs, entering the animal's vitals to the very feather.

With that piercing and dreadful shriek which the horse never utters but in moments of the most excruciating anguish, the tortured beast plunged high into the air, and fell headlong to the earth. The rider extricated himself actively from the fallen animal, and set off as hard as he could run, shouting for aid in tones of deathful agony. But it was all too late; for, ere he had run twenty paces, and while the lancers, who were now coming on at a charge, were still two hundred yards distant, a tall gaunt savage galloped up to him and drove his long spear through his body, the keen point entering at his shoulders, and coming out below his breastbone. Checking his fierce steed instantly, the savage sprung down to the ground, and uttering a tremendous howl, the well-known death halloo, which was taken up and repeated in dread cadence by his tribesmen, gashed the head of the fallen man with his long, keen knife, regardless of his screams and struggles, and tore the scalp from his gory skull, while he was still alive and sensible of the cruel agony. The lancers immediately discharged their escopetas, the balls of which fell thick around him, one of them even taking effect on the Indian, piercing the fleshy part of his bridle arm; but he seemed scarcely to perceive that he was hit, so lightly did he spring to the saddle, wheel his unbroken horse, and dart backward to rejoin his horde, insulting the Mexican soldiers with strange cries and obscene gestures.

Again the main body of the lancers halted, partly, as it would appear, to comfort their wounded comrade, and partly in terror at the scene which was enacting at the same moment on their advanced squadron. For, excited by the sight of their countryman's success, the Comanches charged down, lance in hand, to within sixty or eighty paces of the troopers, who received them with a swift running fire, which emptied two or three of their saddles. This did not, however, check their onset, and the second rank, in its turn, delivered a close volley, killing four more of the Indians, and instantly wheeled off to the rear of their third rank to reload.

At this moment, the great war-chief of the Comanches, who was mounted on a magnificent roan horse, and distinguished by a necklace of the claws of the grizzly bear, the greatest trophy of an Indian warrior's prowess, dashed to the front of his tribe, and galloped along the whole line of the Mexican lancers, brandishing his long feathered lance over his head, and uttering loud yells of defiance.

So rapidly had all this passed, that none of the troopers who had previously discharged their pieces, had as yet reloaded; and now the third rank emptied their carabines one by one, firing with deliberate aim at the dauntless chief, who took no more heed of their bullets, as they rattled one by one against the tough shield of bull's hide which covered his whole body, than he would have done of so many hailstones. When the last piece was discharged, and he was still unwounded he uttered a long yell of peculiar import to his wild followers, and putting his horse's head straight at the front of the troops, rode at them, lance in rest, at full gallop.

No sooner did the savages hear that fierce cry, and perceive the success of their chieftain's maneuver, than they followed his example, and burst like a torrent upon the astonished regulars, before they had time to draw a sword or couch a lance, much less to spur their chargers to their speed to meet their onset at a charge.

The shock was fierce and irresistible; and, in less than a minute, the ranks of the Mexicans were thoroughly broken, and the conflict was converted into a series of single combats. The lance, the tomahawk, the saber and the knife, all did their work of slaughtering. It was a blind and bloody melee, in which each man, civilized or savage, fought desperately and to the last for the dear life. The yells of the

savages, the shouts of the Spanish soldiery, the screams of the wounded horses, and the groans of the dying were blended into a dreadful diapason, above which shrill and limpid rose the clear blast of the Mexican bugle, and the shivering clash of steel.

No quarter was given or asked on either side, and there was neither flight nor flinching, for the two parties were so equally balanced in point of numbers, that they were actually fighting from the first almost man to man, and in truth it was almost a death grapple. By degrees, however, as the Mexicans went down one by one before the untamed energies and desperate fierceness of the Indians, the numbers engaged became more and more unequal; and when the strife had lasted about twenty minutes, the main body of the Mexican horse making no real demonstration of assisting their advanced guard, the few survivors of the lancers broke away as they best might from the horrible scene of havoc, and spurred their jaded horses in mad terror across the plain, pursued by their ruthless enemies, who rode them down, and speared or tomahawked them singly, almost without resistance, until there was not literally a single soldier left alive, unless he were mortally wounded, and rolling on the gory and trampled turf in his death agony.

Not above a dozen of the Comanches had fallen altogether, although many more were wounded, and some three or four dismounted. Still so bold were they, and so much inspirited by the ease of their recent victory, that, after dismounting almost within carbine shot of the cavalry force, to scalp and plunder their vanquished enemies, they actually galloped forward, shouting and yelling most discordantly, as if to charge the whole regiment, which stood idly facing them.

And, in truth, they did ride up so close as to discharge a few arrow-shots among the lancers. This last insult, however, was more than they could endure, and perhaps it was rather the extremity of apprehension which incited them at last to act, as if in desperation of safety should they continue inactive, than anything of chivalry or courage. Whatever might have been the cause, after standing coolly to observe the rout and massacre of their countrymen, which they might undoubtedly have prevented by a bold onslaught, they advanced in line at a sharp trot, which gradually increased into a hard gallop, and then into a gallant running charge, with bugle-note and battle-cry, and all the pomp and splendor of a well-ordered cavalry attack.

The heart of the young soldier throbbed as if it would burst his bosom, at the gallant sights and sounds that accompanied the hurricane of charging horse; and he muttered to himself, with a doubtful smile, that were they but one half as disciplined and trusty as they were gorgeously equipped and brave in outward show they would be dangerous opponents to encounter in the field. And, as it was, the savages, who probably had never intended more than an empty demonstration, broke away into separate parties, although they rode in one direction, and fled before the charge of the regular horse, which indeed they were wholly incapable of resisting, not standing in the ratio of more than one to fifteen or twenty Mexicans.

Still though they might, as Gordon perceived at a glance, have easily ridden clear away from their pursuers, had they chosen to do so, being better mounted, and riding much lighter than the troopers, besides that acting independently they might have dispersed and so defied pursuit, they did not attempt anything of the kind whatever for they merely cantered their horses along, barely keeping out of range of their carbines, and at times even halted and shot an arrow or two at the soldiers, one of whom was actually slain and several wounded by their unerring missiles. Provoked by their maneuvers, goaded by the insults of the savages, and their obscene and irritating gestures, the regiment still pressed forward as fast as they could without blowing their horses or disordering their ranks, and in something less than an hour from the commencement of the skirmish, had passed the side of the hill from which the young dragoon was observing them, and were nearly a mile distant to the southwestward of his encampment, still hotly following the flying Comanches.

"Now if those savages be not drawing the cavalry into an ambush," said Gordon, quietly, to the old soldier, who stood at his elbow observing all that passed, "then I am no judge of Indian artifice or Comanche warfare."

"That is as sure as death, sir," replied the soldier, touching his cap; "and if you'd be pleased to take a squint through the glass at that deep gully, to which they will expose their left flank if they advance two miles further, I guess you'll see what will make you certain of it. Leastways, I've conceited more than once, as I've seen a man on horseback rise up against the sky above the verge of it."

"Hal is it so?" asked the young officer quickly, catching the telescope from the hand of the subordinate, and adjusting it to his eye. "Ay, by the Lord that lives!" he added, as he gazed toward the spot indicated by the trooper,

"there are a hundred or more of the red-skins gathering there, for a flight of arrows and a charge. There will be more sharp work anon."

As he ceased speaking, and while his eyes were yet fixed on the distant ravine, a sharp, long whistle rose on the air behind him, and made him turn his head suddenly, when to his inexpressible delight he saw the well-known form of the Partisan, mounted on his famous brown horse, trotting as leisurely across the scene of the late skirmish toward the outlet of the little amphitheater, from a belt of forest land a short distance to the northward of that where the savages had issued, as if there was not an enemy in sight. And, in truth, although there were five hundred, at the smallest computation, in full view within a couple of miles on the open champaign, there was no real risk in what he did; for the Mexicans were so earnestly engaged in the pursuit of the savages, and so eager were the Comanches on the success of their stratagem, that not an eye or thought was directed toward the solitary horseman who wended his way calm, self-possessed and slow over the corpses of the slaughtered soldiery to join his comrades in their hiding-place.

Gordon responded instantly to the signal of the Partisan by an answering whistle, and, without pause or hesitation, Pierre set spur to Emperor, cantered briskly forward, and entering the bed of the rivulet rode into the small amphitheater at the very moment when Arthur descended the hill to join him.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE.

THE din of distant battle came surging down the light wind, and the sharp rattle of a running fire, mingled with the yells and whoops of barbarous warfare, announced as plainly as words could have done, that the main force of the Mexicans was now at issue with the savages.

But not for that—not that they were yet in the midst of perilous adventure—not that their chances of escape were still slender and uncertain was the welcome of the stout Partisan cold and ungracious. Far from it—for, as he camouflaged down the broken slopes of the hillock, Gordon hailed in his full, clear, manly tones, fearful no longer of being overheard by Comanche or Mexican.

"Julia, huzza! huzza! He is here—come forth and greet him. The Partisan is here already."

And just as the highly-bred brown horse bore him up the low bank from the rivulet's bed, she came out quickly from the little tent with a warm flush on her soft cheeks, and a bright light in her clear, blue eye, and a fleet step, and an outstretched hand, which showed that the joy which she manifested at his coming was from the heart sincere and earnest.

"Oh!" she cried, "Major Delacroix!" and her sweet low voice faltered as she spoke, as if she were on the point of bursting into tears, "how glad, how very glad I am to see you."

"Too glad, I am afraid, dear lady," answered the gallant soldier, bowing almost to the saddle bow, "too glad, I am afraid; for your pleasure almost looks as if you thought I had deserted you."

"Oh! no, indeed—indeed!" she answered, clapping her hands together in the intensity of her earnestness; "I knew that you would die a thousand deaths before you would desert me—before you would desert, I mean," she added, with some slight embarrassment, "any woman in distress or danger."

"You need not have modified your first expression, lady," replied the Partisan, quietly; "as for dying a thousand deaths, I cannot say for that, but certainly so far as risking the one life I do possess, I would do that for you, at least right willingly. Desert any woman, under any circumstances, I hope I never should—but it must not be denied that I, old, weatherbeaten and war-worn, like the rest of us, feel the effects of youth and grace and beauty such as yours—to say nothing of your high and gentle courage. I am afraid if you were old and plain, dear lady, though certainly we would not give you up without a word and a blow too; to those savages, we would not serve you with quite so much devotion."

"I do not believe you," she replied, half laughing, for the veteran forester spoke so cheerfully and gayly, and seemed so totally forgetful of the perils which environed them, that Julia's confidence was restored, and she felt relieved of half her apprehensions by the return of the Partisan. "I do not believe you; I am sure for the poorest and plainest and oldest bag that ever were the weeds and plodded the wretchedness of woman, you would do or die as devotedly as for the brightest of the sex. Do not deny it if you would have me think of you, as I am more than half inclined to do, as a *preux chevalier* in the midst of these degenerate days."

Women are quick, to a proverb, at discovering the effects produced by their charms upon the minds of men; and that man must be a rare and extraordinary monster who, true admiration and real love, even if it is unreturned, does not afford some gratification to the object who has inspired it. No true or

generous woman, no woman, in a word, who is deserving of the love of an honorable man, will for a moment trifle with a heart the sentiments of which she perceives, yet feels herself unable to return—none such will encourage a passion which she knows must be hopeless, or add to the bitter sense of unrequited love the yet keener sting of contempt or manifest dislike. Still, as I have observed, even the best and kindest hearts of the women will derive pleasure from the sense of their power on the minds of men; and if the man be in any wise distinguished for virtue, worth, wit, valor, and so marked out above his fellows, she who perceives herself the mistress of his love, even if she cannot reciprocate it, feeling herself ennobled thereby, and proud of the tribute to her beauty, will often—it is to be hoped, all unconsciously, but oftener yet from half reckless, half inconsiderate coquetry—endeavor to prolong his captivity, and to hold him a willing slave in her soft bondage.

Julia Gordon was a high minded, artless, innocent woman, if ever such an one breathed the breath of life; but still she was a woman! She loved her young husband, the first choice of her virgin heart, with all the intense power of which her sensitive, enthusiastic, ardent soul was capable. She would have looked upon the slightest wandering even of a wayward fancy toward another, as an inexpiable act of infidelity and shame. She would have named it, and named it rightly, infamy and treason, and unwomanly wickedness, to lead an honorable man to form false hopes, or to encourage him to love in vain; but still she was a beauty, conscious of her charms—a gay, light-hearted, happy child of impulse, accustomed to be flattered and admired, to be addressed with homage and devotion, on all sides; and, therefore, though she perceived at once that she had struck and fascinated the wild Partisan at first sight, and though she would not for the universe have intentionally caused him a single pang, she did unconsciously encourage him, and lead him on to wilder and more wandering fancies than he had ever entertained before. Her manner was such that he could not fail to see that she had read his heart of hearts; and there was something in her evident appreciation of his high qualities, her decided confidence in his honor, and her uncontrolled admiration of his chivalrous conduct, which led him to suspect that she was not all indifferent to his feelings. Still there was nothing sensual or evil in the most liberal imagination of the Partisan; no thought of illicit or improper love, much less of voluptuous indulgence, had crossed the horizon of his mind; had such a dream suggested itself to him, he would have spurned it with abhorrence, and the bare consciousness of such a thought would have prevented the possibility of a recurrence.

As it was, he yielded for a time to the soft and unwanted illusion, and he did so with more complete abandonment, that it was, as we have seen, many years since he had felt the influence of feminine attractions, or tasted the fascination of woman's society.

"You flatter me, fair lady," he replied, with a smile, as he dismounted from his good horse; "and flattery from such lips as yours were perilous, indeed, to a younger man than I, and to one alienated from the hopes, the wishes, the delights of civilized society. But let us go into your tent," he continued, "and you shall bestow upon me your hospitality to-day, in re-quital of the poor meal I set before you on the other side of the Bravo. To say the truth, I am both hungry and weary—and that is something for me to confess—but I have eaten nothing since I left you, nor quitted my saddle, except for an hour this morning. That is it, my good fellow," he added, addressing a dragoon who came forward to lead away his charger; "rub him down well, and water him, after a while, and feed him with that forage you have been cutting; and you would do well to feed your own horses, too, and hold yourself in readiness for a start. We will march as soon as the sun sets. Where is your other fellow, Gordon? I left three with you. You have not lost another, surely?"

"No; I thank God. He is on the hill-top, yonder among the chaparral. I posted him there to keep a look-out, and, as it is, the Mexicans nearly surprised him. In truth, nothing saved us, but that the savages had ridden directly over our trail, so that they believe us to have been taken by them, and doubtless massacred."

"As we should have been, doubtless, had they struck our trail by daylight. As it is, they have proved our safeguard so far; and, if we can avoid them hereafter, all will be well. I think, as yet, they know nothing of us."

"The fighting is not ended between them and the lancers," said Gordon, listening intently to the distant uproar.

"Not yet," replied the Partisan, instantly. "But the Comanches are getting the worst of it."

Gordon gazed upon him, half doubtful whether he heard him aright, and then exclaimed:

"But that I knew you, I should think you were speaking at random."

"Oh, no!" said the other; "I am not. Do you not hear that the noise is more remote than

it was? They are a mile further off, at least. The savages are making a running fight of it. Hail your sentinel, and he will tell you it is so."

"What, ho! McLean," shouted the young dragoon. "Jump up, my man, and tell us what you make of the fighting yonder."

The man rose immediately from the bushwood, on the summit of the hill, and saluted as he answered readily.

"I cannot make much out of it now, sir. The Indians charged them on a sudden, a while since, out of the great ravine, and I thought for a moment they would break the lancers; but the Dons held out pretty stiffly, and drove the savages. They all crossed the ridge beyond, helter-skelter, and hand to hand, and I lost sight of them, for ten minutes or so, while they were down in the next bottom. But just before you hailed me, they came into sight again, as they rose over the next swell, and the Comanches were riding for their lives, and the troops were blazing at them, as fast as they could load and fire. I can scarce hear the carbines any longer, and there is not a man in sight, or a horse either, except those that will never ride or be ridden more."

"You see," said Pierre, coolly, "I did not speak at random. But call him down, and let them cook and dine, and then saddle. The sooner we get under way, the better. Pardon us, dear lady," he added, turning to Julia, who had been observing all that had passed with singular interest, and not without some emotion; "these are not fitting subjects for your ears; but your safety makes it needful that we should speak of them. Now, if you will allow us admittance, we will be your guests, for we must take counsel, and it is fitting that you should hear all, and advise with us."

"Pray, come in," she replied, unaffectedly, "without any more words. We are so far indebted to you now, that ceremony between us would be worse than idle. There," she continued, as they all three entered the narrow precincts of the tent; "sit down on that bearskin, while I wait on you. We have some of your own wine left, and some cold venison. Arthur, bid one of the men make some water hot, and we will have tea in five minutes."

The Partisan had not lived so many years on the frontier, or associated so long, as he had done, with the various tribes of Indians, who still roam unconquered over the vast wilds westward of the Mississippi, without having contracted something of their habits and modes of thinking.

Among their habits, the most marked, perhaps, was a sort of grave taciturnity, when he was not very deeply moved, or carried out his usual line of conduct or demeanor, by any unvoiced or unnatural excitement—a reluctance to communicate hastily anything which had occurred, if not of immediate moment, or in any event to dwell upon his own actions or achievements. And at this moment Pierre Delacroix's conduct was singularly demonstrative of this habit. Any other than he, or one like him trained to peril, and the prudence which is derived from peril, would have entered open-mouthed, immediately on rejoining his friends, upon the recital of his own adventures, his doings, and his sufferings, interlarded, it is most probable, with no slight strains of self-glorification.

Far different from this, however, was his course. He took the place assigned to him by Julia, without saying a word, and partook of the simple viands which were set before him, in absolute silence, except when the courtesies of the table required him to reply to the lady. Once or twice, indeed, the young soldier endeavored to draw him indirectly into a recital of what had occurred to him during the night on the prairie; but he had only elicited monosyllabic answers, from which he derived no satisfaction. When the repast was ended, and coffee set before them, he produced his pipe, and filling it with his favorite mixture of tobacco and *bois gris*, applied himself for a few minutes to smoking silently, Gordon following his example, and Julia awaiting patiently the relation, which, with the true woman's instinct, she foresaw to be close at hand. At length Pierre Delacroix shook out the ashes from the bowl of his Indian pipe, replaced the instrument in his pouch, and raising his eyes calmly, said in a quiet tone:

"Now then, lieutenant, since we are about to start, it were, perhaps, as well that we should determine whither."

"Whither," exclaimed Gordon, starting, and looking very anxiously in the old soldier's face. "I thought that had been determined long ago. I thought we were in full route for Taylor's camp before Monterey."

"It is impossible," replied the Partisan. "I did hope at the first to effect it, but the hope was delusive—the thing is a sheer impossibility. We are in the midst of out-laying parties of regulars and, what is worse yet, of guerrillas; and, worst of all, of those accursed Comanches."

"And to return?" asked Gordon.

"Is equally impossible."

"In God's name, then, what can we do? Is there nothing left to us men but to die sword in

hand, knowing that, we dead, she must fall into the hands of these savages."

"Had there been no other resource than that, I should not now be talking of it."

"What then? For the love of Heaven, speak!" cried the young husband, actually trembling with the violence of his anxiety and apprehension.

"It is impossible for a party, at once too strong to avoid discovery, and too weak to resist an enemy, to push on to Monterey, even if we had not a lady with us. I could, myself, run the gauntlet thither, and arrive in safety, though even that is doubtful. You, or she, at least, must remain in concealment until I can bring you such succor as will suffice to her safety."

"Remain in concealment, here?"

"Not here, exactly, nor yet very far distant."

"Can it be done?"

"I think it can, with safety—else had not named it."

"And whence will you seek succor?"

"Whence God and the fortunes of war shall send it. Perhaps not nigher than the general's camp—perhaps I may stumble on Jack Hays, or Walker, or McCulloch, or Gillespie's rangers. They are on the scout almost all the time, either in the van or rear of the army; and now I think it likely they will be down hereaway, with the intent to open our communications. God send that they may!"

"God send it so, indeed!" replied Arthur Gordon, earnestly. "But what has led you so completely to alter your views and intentions?"

"That which I have seen with my own eyes, or heard with my own ears, last night."

"And what may that have been?"

"Listen. I was awakened last night, a little while before the Comanches passed you, by the sound of a scuffle and a faint groan. Before I could get on my feet, however, I had the pleasure of seeing that scoundrel, whose life we spared in the morning—and a most stupid thing we did in sparing it—lead his horse out of the circle and leap on his back. There was no use in awakening you, so I untethered Emperor as quickly as I could, and set out in pursuit of him. For all the speed I could make, he had got full a half-mile away on the open prairie before I was in the saddle; but I cared little enough for that, seeing that in a five miles' race, I knew well enough that I could make up such a gap as that, and overhaul him, too, without much trouble. But what did vex me, and set me to thinking, was, that instead of making the best of his way back over the ground we had traversed in the morning, he struck off here to the north-west, riding as straight as if he had been following a beaten track, without a sign of hesitation, or so much as looking behind him."

"That was strange," said Gordon; "what the duse could it mean?"

"It meant clearly enough that he knew he had friends nearer at hand than Carrera's men in the rear, and that he had no idea at all that he was discovered by any of our party, much less followed."

"Ah! was it indeed so?"

"It is so indeed. I knew that as soon as he turned his horse's head north-westward. But I knew not where his friends were, nor how many, and I wanted to be sure of that. So I struck off still further west than he, and kept myself out of sight among the timber, and behind the chaparral. It was true I had to go two miles to his one, for I was riding round the circle across which he was striking; but what of that? Brown Emperor can take three strides to his two, and stride twice as long as his mustang's longest. Well, I kept him in sight, and myself out of sight, and well was it for me that I did so. I soon found out whether he was bound, and I was thinking of taking a straight course for the rancho, at which I saw he was aiming, when all at once I heard a yell in the forest, scarcely three hundred yards ahead of me, and before I had time to think, if thinking would have done any good, out galloped forty or fifty red-skins from the forest, and drove right across the open ground right down upon our runaway. He felt that he was lost, I think, as soon as he saw them, for he made but a very sorry race of it, wheeling and turning to and fro, as if he knew not whether to fly, and the consequence was that they ran him down in less than ten minutes, and that within less than a hundred yards of the brake which hid me. If I had just then had ten rangers with me, armed with good western rifles, they never would have served him as they did, nor would one of themselves have got off scot-free. But what could I do? I was but one against fifty, and I knew not how soon my own turn might come; so I had only to stand by and look on while they—"

"Murdered him!" exclaimed Julia, covering both her eyes with her fair hands; "good God! how terrible!"

"Burnt him alive, lady," said the Partisan, coolly. "If they had only killed him, I should have thought nothing of it, for that I meant to do myself within half an hour. But when they

ties him to the stake and heaped the fagots round him, it did make my blood boil, for though he was a Mexican, a traitor, and a murderer, still he was a white man, and after his fashion, I suppose, a Christian. I leveled my rifle two or three times, I believe, and might have killed their great war-chief, if I had dared. But to do so could not have saved him, and would have lost not only myself—that would have been a matter of no consequence—but you, beyond a doubt."

"Burnt him alive!" exclaimed Julia, whose hands had dropped from before her eyes into her lap at the first words of his reply, and who had sat gazing him full in the face, speechless with terror, and incapable of comprehending what he said afterward. "Burnt him alive, and before your eyes!"

"Before my eyes, lady! Not a prayer, not a shriek, not a groan of the wretched devil escaped my ears, and the smell of his roasting flesh sickened and almost choked me!" cried the Partisan, now himself terribly affected, and apparently fascinated by the very horror of the scene, and unable to pass over the shocking details. His eye had a wild stare as he spoke, and the big sweat-drops rolled like rain from his sunburnt brow, and his fingers gripped at the hilt of his knife, as if they would have embedded themselves into polished buck-horn, and his voice was hoarse and husky.

"Once or twice, in his agony, he called upon my name, and shrieked to me, for the love of the holy Virgin, to preserve him, although, God help him, he knew not that I was nigh at hand to hear him. As I hope to live hereafter, it was all I could do to hold myself from rushing out upon them."

"And why, why did you hold back?" exclaimed Julia, wildly catching him by the arm, in the intensity of her passion, "why did you not rush out upon them?"

"I could have but died with him."

"Then shoud you have died with him!" she cried, scarce knowing what she said. "Not to have done so, is not like the man I have heard you call—not like the man I took you for!"

"Hush, Julia, hush!" cried her husband, springing to his feet. "Be silent, child, if you cannot speak reason—"

But Delacroix interrupted him, speaking very slowly, and with an inexpressibly mournful intonation of voice.

"Let her go on," he said, "let her go on, Arthur Gordon. I am used to it—used to it for years—for a life, used to be misunderstood and misrepresented. Let her go on! It was for her sake I did it, and most meet it is that she should pay me for it with ingratitude. Who ever served or loved a woman and met other punishment for his services? I was a fool—I am a fool, but did not expect this at her hands."

He hung his bold head as he spoke, and one or two big tears, the first that he had shed in years, rolled down his swarthy cheeks and fell on his hard hands, and he sat staring at them as they fell, as if he knew not what they were or what ailed him.

"My God! exclaimed Gordon, passionately, "I believe you are bent on driving me mad, Julia! By Heaven, I believe you are turned idiot!"

"We are all idiots together, I say!" exclaimed the tough old soldier, dashing away the last teardrop from his clear gray eye with the back of his hand, and starting to his feet abruptly. "All idiots together, to be telling idle tales, and listening to them here, when we should be up and doing. Bid your men strike the tent, and pack just what baggage your lady cannot spare. Pack it on the dragoon horse, whose saddle is left empty by that murderer's deed, who has dearly rued it. The rest with the tent and pontoon must be abandoned, and the mules that bore them must be slain. Let them hide everything in the chaparral; the sun will have set within an hour. Meanwhile, I will go forth and see that the coast is clear."

"But whither, whither are you about to lead us?" inquired Gordon, anxiously.

"If you trust me you will follow me, lieutenant, whithersoever I lead you. If not, you will not follow me at all, for if it be my intent to deceive you, I can do so by words as well as by actions. It is for you to decide. I have no time to make many words, nor is it my wont to do so. I swear to save yourself and your wife from all the dangers that beset you, if I can. If I cannot, I intend to die with, or for you, just which you please to call it, although I did disappoint your lady by not dying as she would have had me do very sentimentally, in company with a vile murderer and traitor, to whom my life or death could do no earthly good."

"Oh! Major Delacroix!" exclaimed Julia, who had now recovered from her bewilderment, and was sensible of the error she had committed, "you are offended, you are angry with me, and justly—I have been most ungrateful."

"Not angry, lady—not offended. A man can not be angry with such a one as you, do what you will with him. I am disappointed, perhaps hurt, but certainly neither angry nor offended."

"You must forgive me!" she exclaimed, springing passionately forward, and catching his hand in both her own, "you must—you must forgive me! You must remember that I am but a weak girl, unused to hear of horrors such as you related—horrors, God help me, which may befall me next—horrors which are strong enough, it seems to me, to bewilder the minds of strong, brave men, and which have half maddened me. I knew not then, I know not even now, what it was I said—will you but forgive me?"

"Surely I would, had I any thing to forgive, sweet lady," he replied, with a grave, sad smile. "But I have nothing, unless it be," he added, with a low sigh, "my own folly. But a truce to this; we have indeed no time for parleying. Will you trust me and follow me? As we ride onward I will tell you whither."

"To the world's end!" answered the beautiful girl, clasping her hands and blushing crimson with the violence of her own emotions. "To the world's end, if you will forgive me."

"And you, lieutenant?" he added, quickly turning a keen glance to the face of the young dragoon. "Will you trust and follow me?"

"I do not know why you should press the question," replied Arthur, a little sharply. "No one, so far as I know, has distrusted you, and as for following you, we never thought of doing aught else. You frighten a young, timid girl out of her senses with a tale of terror, and then take offense at her bewildered and romantic folly—you do not know the nature of women, Partisan," he continued, becoming aware that he was carrying it with rather too high a hand to suit the temperament of his auditor, and desirous of turning the thing into a jest, "and are not aware that they quarrel the most with those whom they like best."

"I do not know their nature, as you say," returned the Partisan, "nor am I sure that it were for my happiness to learn it any further. At all events, I have not the time, nor am very likely to have the opportunity of doing so. Now will you be so kind as to issue your orders to your men, and you, madam, to make your preparations for a ride which may extend through the night until daybreak to-morrow?"

He spoke so decidedly that there was no excuse for attempting to prolong the conversation, and Gordon left the little tent immediately in order to give his directions, while the Partisan lifted his rifle from the ground, where he had deposited it on entering, and turned to follow the young officer without saying another word.

But ere he had reached the entrance, Julia, who had been standing with downcast eyes and a strange expression, half sad, half passionate, on her beautiful features, sprung forward to intercept him, and again caught him by the arm.

"What have I done?" she cried, passionately, "what have I done that you thus spurn me—thus despise me?"

"I, lady!" and he gazed at her in blank astonishment: "I spurn—I despise you!"

"Yes, yes! miserable me! and I deserve it all, ay, more than all. Oh, God! oh, God! I shall go mad! What shall I do to win your forgiveness?"

"I have said, madam," he replied, mastering himself and retaining his self-composure with a mighty effort, "that I had nothing to forgive. But now it is my turn to ask," and his voice assumed a deeper tone of feeling, and his whole manner showed an intenser meaning, "will you spare me?" You know what I mean, lady—all women know their power, and, I suppose, all abuse it. But as I have endeavored to serve you truly, as I intend to do to the end—as I am resolved to die for you—will you spare me, I say? Spare me my self-respect, my consciousness of right, my manhood, my repose of soul, my honor. If you will, lady, I forgive, I bless you. If not—if not, tremble, I say tremble, not at the thought of my vengeance, but of your own remorse. Think of this, lady, and fare you well. We speak no more alone together—no more, forever!"

And he flung her hand, which he had held tightly clasped in his own while he spoke, away from him half contemptuously, half indignantly, turned on his heel and left her.

She gazed on him for a moment wistfully, and then sunk down upon the bear-skin on which he had been sitting, buried her face in the fur, and wept bitterly, as might be seen from the convulsive sobs which shook her whole frame as she lay prostrate in her desperate sorrow.

A woman's heart is a strange thing, and woe to him who plays with or perverts it.

Meanwhile, the Partisan went forth and reconnoitered the plain, and assured himself that the Comanches and their pursuers were indeed out of the range of sound or sight, having gone off in a direction that would carry them, he was well assured, far from the line in which he proposed to travel.

Within an hour he returned to the camp which had been the scene of so much mental suffering and excitement to all parties who had passed the last weary long hours within its guarded precincts. But when he did return, he had mastered his composure, for he now fully understood his own feelings and perceived the

peril of indulging them. And he found all his comrades collected and self-possessed, at least in appearance, and prepared to set forth at a moment's notice.

The tent was no longer visible, nor any of that superfluous baggage which had been brought along to diminish as much as possible the hardships of the lady during her hard and dangerous journey. All had been either hidden so closely as to avoid any casual observation or had been destroyed altogether. The horse of the unhappy sergeant had been equipped, instead of his own demipique, with the pack-saddle of the poor predestined mule, and stood, seemingly conscious of his degradation, loaded with such necessary baggage as could in no way be dispensed with. Gordon and his men, all fully armed and accoutred, were at their chargers' heads, and Julia, pale as marble, and with a melancholy and languid expression which rendered her if possible more beautiful than ever, was already seated on her high blooded jennet.

The appearance of the Partisan, and the first quick gesture of his hand, gave the signal; and all the men vaulted at once into their saddles.

"All is safe!" he exclaimed, cheerfully. "To horse, to horse, and away!"

And with the word, he laid his hand on the pommel of the brown charger's demipique, and, without setting his foot into the stirrup, sprung at one bound to his back.

Then, after saying a few words in a low voice to Arthur, who communicated them in turn to one of the dragoons, he bowed to the lady, saying, "And now, if you are ready, we will proceed at once," and rode at an easy gait out of the gorge, followed by all the party.

Gordon and Julia came imminently behind him, and were, in their turn, followed by a trooper leading the loaded pack horse. The newly-appointed sergeant remained behind with the other dragoon and the mules, until the remainder of the party had cleared the defile and issued on the open plain, over which the declining sun was pouring a flood of crimson light, from beneath a mass of dark leaden clouds, of which the lower edge alone was fringed with gloomy fire, while all above was dark and black as night.

It was an ominous and lurid gleam which deluged the wide plains, and turned the groves and forests, robed as they were in hazy mist, into masses that vied in hue and brilliancy with ore liquid from the furnace; and the shadow projected upward, from the heavy layer of storm cloud which skirted all the horizon to the south-westward, over the darkened firmament, rendered the effect of the scene yet more threatening and dismal.

The heart of Julia sank, as she gazed around; and she felt that the least addition to the sense of dread and half superstitious awe which now beset her, would be too much for her powers of endurance. Yet, while she thought thus, another item was added—it was the sharp and sudden crack of two rifles, discharged almost simultaneously in the small amphitheater from which they had just departed.

Sue started in her saddle as if she had received a blow, and would have fallen from her seat, had not her husband thrown his powerful arm around her, and supported her frame on the back of her palfrey.

"It is nothing," he whispered, "dearest love. It is nothing, upon my honor. I should have told you, had I imagined that it would so alarm you."

"But what was it, Arthur? Oh! you are deceiving me again. I am sure you are deceiving me. Let me know the worst, I implore you, at once, and I will try to bear it."

"Nay, Julia, I have told you; it is nothing only the poor mules which we were compelled to shoot, as we could not bring them with us, and dared not leave them to follow, and, by following, betray us."

"More blood!" cried Julia, bursting into a paroxysm of tears; "more blood! my God! my God! when will this have an end?"

"You should have thought of that, Julia," replied the young soldier, sharply and bitterly, "before you married a soldier. That done, such thoughts are too late."

"Alas! alas! they are, indeed, too late!"

"And do you cry alas! for that, false girl?" exclaimed Gordon, in so loud a tone that his words reached the ears of the Partisan, who instantly reined back his horse, and laying his hand kindly on the young man's arm, said, in a low voice:

"Oh! peace, peace, for shame! Consider what she has borne, what she has yet to bear—and all for you."

Gordon was vexed, and raised his head proudly, with a bitter reply on his tongue; but ere he could utter it, the Partisan had fallen yet further back, and was ordering the two dragoons who had just galloped up from the rear. After directing the private to fall in beside him who led the baggage-horse, and sending the sergeant forward two hundred yards, to lead the party on the other side of the lady, he addressed her as lightly and cheerfully as if nothing had happened to disturb their feelings, and no dangers were around them. "And now,

"fair lady," he began, "if you have any portion of what men call your sex's curiosity—although, I dare say, if the truth were known, we men are just as curious—you must be dying to know whither I am going to conduct you, with all this mystery."

"I wish it were to my grave," she answered, raising her mild, soft eyes to meet his. "I never shall be happy more till I lie in it."

"Nay, lady, speak not thus," returned the veteran, warnly. "I must not hear you speak thus, even lightly. Death, at the best, is a dread mystery; and if it be true, that as the tree falls so shall it lie, a very fearful and appalling termination. In God's good time, we must all come to that; to His good wisdom, therefore, let us leave it. And, oh, by no levity or petulance of ours, let us call down His anger on our heads! But, I assure you, it is to no gloomy place, no fearful or dark abiding-place, that I hope to conduct you, but to a sort of fairy bower, inhabited," he added, assuming a tone of gayety which he perhaps scarcely felt, "by what I thought, till I met your blue eyes, Mistress Gordon, the loveliest woman I e'er looked upon."

Despite herself, Julia Gordon was interested and amused, and yielding, womanlike, to the immediate impulse, she cried, "What! a fairy bower, and a fair woman, in this howling wilderness?"

"Ay, lady, even so! and thereby hangs a tale, which, as you will be thrown, I think, upon her hospitality, and as it may beguile the tediousness of our night-march, I will relate to you, if you choose to hear it."

"Oh! tell it, by all means, Partisan," cried Gordon, eager to atone for his late petulance, and to divert his wife's apprehension; "I hope it is a love tale."

"Cato's a proper person!" answered Delacroix, laughing. "You see I can quote, lieutenant. But here goes my story."

CHAPTER XI. THE FRONTIERMAN'S TALE.

AT the moment in which the Partisan commenced his tale, the sun was in the very act of setting, and the party was entering the great belt of forest land, which had been described as bounding the view to the westward. This forest was a vast extent of rolling land, rising gradually into hills, as it receded from the river, covered with huge timber trees, beneath which the underwood grew dense and luxuriant—the spot at which they entered it, narrowing by degrees, as they advanced, into a narrow winding woodpath, not many yards in width where it was broadest, and in places so straight that but one horse could go abreast. It was already very dark even upon the open plain, but here the last faint glimmer of the twilight skies was intercepted by the thick foliage. The night air was, however, delicate and balmy, and thanks to the friendly darkness of the night, no danger was apprehended for the present.

Such were the circumstances under which the old forester began his recital of events, which, though they had occurred long before he even knew the existence of his fellow-travelers, were now like to affect them nearly, and which therefore possessed a strange interest to their minds.

"It was a little better than a year ago," he began, "that I first visited this part of the country, which I now know—every pass, glen, and pond, and rivulet of it—as if it were my own garden. All then was violence, and fierce irregular strife, and vengeful indiscriminate warfare, and confusion. Our army, small in numbers, but strong in discipline and spirit, well officered, and confident of its own powers, lay as yet at Point Isabel, waiting for the arrival of reinforcements, and the means of transportation, in order to take the initiative in earnest. All the fighting that had been done as yet, had been done by the rangers, and the Partisan-Texan troopers, who, mindful of the strict discipline and stern subordination required in regular warfare, did battle pretty much, as it is said, on their own hook; and, to speak the truth, had scarcely learned as yet to temper the soldier's ardor with the Christian's mercy.

"It is true, there was much, if not to excuse at least to palliate their thirst for vengeance. Few of them but had lost some dear relation, or beloved friend, in the savage raids and forays of the Mexicans. Many had returned from expeditions taken in defense of what they believed to be their right, their liberties, and their country, only to find their homes a heap of blood-quenched ashes—only to learn that their wives, their daughters, all that men hold best and dearest, had undergone the worst extremities of outrage, at the hands of their ruthless enemies, and had rejoiced in death itself as an escape from suffering, from dishonor, less tolerable than the cruelest of tortures.

"I was alone on this good horse which I now ride, and armed as you now see me. For then, as now, I scarce can tell you why it suited my temper best to ride alone in search of adventure; and, though at times I would join this or that band of rangers, when on some actual service which promised excitement and the chance of action, I for the most part counted by myself.

"On this occasion, however, I had no friend.

duty to perform, being charged with dispatches from the general to the chief of the band, whom I will not name, nor otherwise designate, except as being ever the most daring and successful in the onslaught, although too often the most merciless in the moment of victory."

"I said I would not name him, Gordon. Nor will I. Perhaps he had wrongs to avenge on these Mexicans, which justified him in his own eyes, if not in ours—which turned his blood to flame, and from the very softness of his natural heart distilled the bitterest venom. At all events, he was, as you have said, a gallant soldier as ever set foot in stirrup and he died in his duty, gallantly, within a lance's length of my sword arm, covering the retreat of others, when all was lost, but honor. Peace to his ashes, and forgiveness to his sins! for which of us is sinless? I knew him when he would have moved aside rather than tread upon a worm, so soft and tender was his heart—I knew him again, when neither youth nor beauty, neither sex nor gray hairs would bend him from his ruthless vengeance. Circumstances! circumstances! ay! it is circumstance, after all, that makes saints or savages, monsters or martyrs, of us all! We will speak of him no more, lieutenant, except as I must tell my tale."

"Pardon my interruption and proceed," said Gordon. "We are most interested in your narrative already. But what does the fellow want? He has fallen back upon us."

And as he spoke, the sergeant who had been riding in advance, fell back upon the party, and reined up his horse.

"The road forks into two, major," he said, saluting as he addressed the Partisan, "at a hundred yards hence. The right hand path, I fancy, is the one, by what you told me of the route; but it is very deep and miry, and seems to end in a wet morass. Which must I take, sir?"

"The right hand path. It is not a morass, but a shallow lakelet or lagoon with a good hard bottom; it will not wet your girths, sergeant. But halt, when you reach the brink of it, and I will guide you through, or you may chance to lose the direction. Well, my friends," he continued, "I was, as I said, bearing dispatches from the general to this chief, and he bade me lose no time in overhauling him. He knew that the band had set out to surprise a rancho hereaway; in which it was supposed that a guerrilla force was organizing, and that arms were concealed; and he thought, I fancy, that they would do their work too summarily and too fiercely. He did not tell me so in words, but he ordered me to overtake them, and gave me authority to supersede the officer, we spoke of, as indeed I outranked him, and to take command of the party.

"I did not altogether like the duty; for as you may have gathered from my words, although I did not like his deeds—indeed I might say I abhorred them—I had some sympathies for the man; had passed through troublesome times and hard trials by his side; and, indeed, owed my life to him once or twice, as perhaps he owed his to me. I did not, therefore, wish to supersede him, or wound his feelings. I was pretty sure that a quarrel would come out of it; and though I did not care a straw for the quarrel itself, I did not fancy quarreling with so old a comrade. But what of that? I had my orders, and had no choice but to obey them."

"Well, it was a lovely summer's evening, as ever shone out of Heaven, when I passed through this belt of forest; not exactly here, or in this direction, for I came in further to the south-eastward, and approached the clearing which surrounds the plantation, whither we now are bound. The soft air was playing, much as it is now, through the tree-tops; but it was then the very flush of summer and all the woods were ablaze with beautiful flowers; and odorous with innumerable perfumes, and alive with many-colored birds, filling the forest with their discordant cries or sweet melodies. It had been a very hot day, but the evening dews were falling soft and gentle, and the young moon was riding high above the tree-tops, with all her silver stars about her in the far deep blue sky, though still the lingering rays of the departed sun were visible half-way toward the zenith in the west. And yet, it was neither day nor night. Another hour and every bird would be tranquil on its roost, every beast would have sought its den—but now, it was truly a magic time, filled with all that is sweetest and most tranquil of the day, all that is gladdest and least sober of the night.

"I was moved differently from my wont, and noticed and felt the influences of the season and the hour, as I think I never noticed them before; for I am not much of a dreamer, nor greatly given to romance, being, as you know, rather a man of action; when suddenly, as I rode along, following the track of the horse hoofs, which I could easily distinguish in the mossy greenward, and judging by many certain indications that I could not now be far behind them, though I heard nothing to denote their vicinity; when suddenly—I say, I caught the distant sounds of merriment and revelry; the light cadences of the guitar, the merry laugh of girls, the deep rich voices of the men

singers, in the harmonious Spanish tongue, and all the glee and anxiety of a fandango.

"I felt a momentary sense of pleasure, for I knew that I was in time, which I had feared might not be the case; and that the attack, which it was my mission to prevent or at least to render bloodless, had not as yet taken place. The next instant a sudden doubt, a great fear fell upon me. How could it be that I should be so close to the rancho, and the band, of which I was in pursuit, yet closer, but unseen, unheard, and unsuspected? I knew that not a moment must be lost. That even now the rangers must be stealing with ready arms upon their victims; that even now the doom of the gay lancers must be sealed, unless my presence should arrest it. I gave my good horse the spur, and throwing the rein upon his neck, galloped at the top of his speed along the intricate and mazy wood-track.

"Never, in all my life, did I spur so hard; and never did a road seem so long, or so devious; nor was this the effect of imagination only; for I have since ascertained by actual inspection although the distance, as the bird flies from the spot, where I first heard the music, to the rancho whence it proceeded, is but a short mile, the road by which alone you can reach it, measures three at the least, winding to and fro to avoid pathless brakes and deep barrancas, and is exceedingly deep and miry.

"The sound of my horse's tramp, splashing through the deep clay, was already heard by the lancers, and heard, alas! by their ambushed foes, whom I fear it spurred to accelerated action: when suddenly from the wood to my left, the shrill blast of the bugle rose piercingly upon the night air, and was answered by a second at a little distance. There was an instant's pause, breathless and awful as the lull that precedes the burst of a thunderstorm; and then a long loud shout burst out on all sides, and the quick running rattle of a hundred rifle-shots fired in quick succession. God! what a shriek succeeded! And then the clash of blades, and the blasphemies and yells of the charging Texans, and the deep oaths and dying groans of the slaughtered Spaniards and the howling of hounds and mastiffs; and, above all, piercing my very brain, the maddening screams of women pealed up in horrid dissonance to the peaceful heavens, which, in a moment afterward, were crimsoned with the glare of the rushing flames, making the twilight scenery of the calm forest lurid and ruddy as the fabulous groves of hell!"

"Halt! halt! you are at the water's edge!" cried the voice of the advanced dragoon, whom they could now scarce see, though he was but a few paces from them. For so deep was the gloom of the woodland now that, had not the path by which they traveled been walled in, as it were, by the impenetrable thickets of the trackless chaparral, it would have been impossible for them to follow its direction.

"Oh! do not interrupt your tale," cried Julia. "Finish it, will you not, before we cross this terrible, black-looking water?"

"I must not do so, lady," replied the deep tones of the Partisan. "This terrible, black-looking water, which, by the way, under a noonday sky is a beautiful blue mirror, as ever reflected beauty's face when brightest; this water, I say, once traversed, and the little belt of thicket which borders it, we shall be in the open woods, and must halt there until the moon shall rise to light us on our onward way. That will not be for an hour or two; and, as we have made better progress than I hoped or expected, and, as we have passed unharmed one of our greatest points of danger, we will make a pause of an hour to rest ourselves and our beasts, and will light a brand of fire to cheer us. There is no danger, I assure you, if you will let me lead your jennet by the rein. Gordon, keep close to your lady on the right; and you, my men, follow close upon our heels, turning neither to the bridle nor to the sword-hand. It is a strange place, though perfectly safe to one who knows it. A ridge of pure white gravel, some ten yards wide, runs right across the lagoon at this point, not above three feet under water, while everywhere else the bottom is deep black mud at two or three fathoms. I could ride it, however, with my eyes blindfolded."

"I hope so!" Gordon answered, forcing a laugh; "for if you cannot, our chance, I think, is but a slight one. The darkness of the night, I fancy, would prove a most efficient bandage for the eyes of any ordinary man."

"Not for mine, lieutenant," answered the Partisan. "I am a sort of owl, I believe; for I sometimes imagine I can see better by night than I can by day. At all events, I can discern the spot distinctly by which the path pierces the brake on the further shore, and I can mark the glimmering bark of an old dead tree on the left hand of it."

"You must indeed have the eyes of an owl," said the young soldier; "for I can distinguish nothing, not even the forest beyond. It seems to me that the lake recedes into endless distance, and is veiled in impenetrable gloom."

"When you last visited the camp...?"

night as I have, you will see clearer. But, come, let us enter it. Indeed, lady, there is no danger, though you had better gather up the skirt of your long dress, lest it get splashed by the water."

And, without further words, he took the bridle of her jennet in his right hand and led it down into the water, she sitting perfectly passive, and encouraged by the confidence of his manner, so as to fear no danger.

In fact, as he said, the water was shallow, nowhere exceeding three feet in depth and in many places scarce wetting the fetlocks of the horses. Everywhere the bottom was hard, and the footing perfectly secure; and they had already traversed above two thirds of the whole distance, so that even Julia could now distinguish the fringed bank and the spectral-looking, weather-bleached tree, which marked the landing-place, when suddenly two or three heavy plunges were heard in the deep water, on either side of them, and as many long lines of dim phosphoric light were seen rippling the dark surface of the pool, and advancing rapidly toward them.

"Great God! what are those?" cried Julia, terrified now beyond all comprehension.

And, at the same instant, the clear voice of the Partisan rose trumpet-like above the stillness of the night, which had been broken only by the dashing of the horses' hoofs in the shallow water.

"Ride! ride!" he shouted; "ride for your lives, I say!" and, as he spoke, he drove the spurs rowel deep into his own horse's sides, and lifting Julia's palfrey with a light but powerful hand, he forced them both at once from a walk into a full gallop.

The foam and spray were driven high in the air, for three or four bounds of their high mettled beasts, and the riders were drenched from head to foot with the water churned up by the rapid hoofs. But happily it was but three or four bounds; and the whole party stood a moment after the alarm was given, in safety, on the further bank, just as three monstrous alligators, for such were their last enemies, shot fiercely up to the very shore, in pursuit of their hardly escaped prey.

The next instant, a wild, melancholy, thrice repeated cry—"Hoo! hoo! hoo!"—rose from the thicket close before them, making the blood run cold in Julia's veins.

"Merciful Heaven!" she exclaimed, "we are beset on all sides!"

And, almost fainting, she would have fallen from her horse, had not Pierre caught her in his arms.

"Dismount!" he cried; "dismount, Gordon; she has fainted!" and, as he spoke, he placed her gently in her husband's arms. "Bring her this way! this way—we shall be on the high ground in a minute. Look to the horses, lads; and strike a light, one of you. There are flint, steel and tinder in the pouch by my holsters. Why it was nothing but a cougar. Who would have thought she would have been so frightened at the cry of a cougar?"

"She has gone through enough to-day to kill twenty women with terror," remarked Gordon, very anxiously. "God only grant that this has not killed her. She has no pulse, that I can feel, at all, and her heart is as still as death!"

"No! no!" cried the Partisan. "No! no! do not fear; we will have some fire in the twinkling of an eye, and all will be right. Here we are: wrap her in my blanket and chafe her hands; she will come to in a minute."

In a very short time the formidable western ax was brought into play, and dry wood was felled and split in sufficient quantities to build an ample fire. The genial warmth which was diffused by this, and the sedulous attentions which were bestowed on her, soon restored Julia Gordon to her senses; and, with that buoyancy of spirits peculiar to persons of her excitable and impulsive temperament, so soon as she returned to her consciousness, she recovered all her wonted elasticity of mind and brilliancy of manner.

After some short and hurried conversation concerning the danger which they had just escaped from the hideous alligators, and the habits as well of that loathsome reptile as of the sleek and glossy cougar, whose cry had been the immediate cause of alarm, which, acting on Julia's overwrought spirits and over-fatigued frame, had produced her fainting fit, the thoughts of all the party returned to the narrative of the Partisan.

Both Julia and Gordon felt sure that their prospects of present safety and future escape were, by some means or other, connected with the persons of that narrative; and with the feverish and nervous irritation which urges men in time of immediate danger and despondency to seek how they may penetrate the secrets of futurity, they now eagerly pressed Delacroix to resume his recital at the point where it had been interrupted.

"I think," he replied, at first to their solicitations, "that it were wiser in you, by far, to endeavor to get some rest, if it were but an hour. The night is as yet but little spent; and, so soon as the moon rises, we must again be in the sad-

dle. There may be danger again, I would warn you; and danger of a nature which, should your fortitude give way as it did but now, could not be avoided; and whether there be danger or no, there will be at least extreme fatigue."

"Oh, no!" said Julia, earnestly. "It is impossible; I cannot sleep. Oceans of laudanum could not make me sleep to-night, I am so fearfully excited. Should I lie down and attempt to court sleep, my own thoughts would lash me into madness. But it is selfishness in me to hinder you from rest. Let me not influence you, I entreat. I pray you, Partisan Gordon, I command you, lie down in your cloaks and sleep. I will sit and watch by the fire; I assure you I am not in the least afraid. See, the men are already sound asleep, as if there were no danger within miles."

"They have no responsibility," answered the Partisan; "so soon as the horses were securely tethered and the fire kindled, their duties were ended. I told them I required no sentinel; and used to act ever under orders, they have almost forgotten how to think—perhaps, happier so. For us—I can speak for Gordon as for myself—the necessity of exerting every faculty on my part to insure your safety, and deep anxiety on his part, must, at all events, hold us watchers until such time, at least, as we can see you in temporary safety. If, therefore, you are not inclined to sleep, I may as well kill time by my poor story, as let it lag along at its own weary pace."

"Go on, I pray you. We are quite comfortable here, and quite safe, I fancy; and I am dying to hear what happened next."

"I will resume the thread, then, where I broke it off abruptly. When I heard that tremendous uproar, and saw the outburst of that furious conflagration, I spurred my horse the faster, and at last, issuing from the forest, came upon such a scene of horror, blood and devastation as I trust it may never be my fate to look upon again,

"The rancho or country dwelling-house which had been attacked, was of unusually large dimensions, consisting of many buildings, with barns, stables, cattle-folds and out-houses of every kind, which are the necessary appendages to the residence of a great proprietor. All these were built of the usual sun-dried brick, thatched with straw, and to all, as I thought at the first glance, the torch had been applied indiscriminately.

"The main building—a large, low, one-story house, adorned with wide, rustic porticoes, and surrounded by green lawns and luxuriant gardens—was already wrapt in flames, which burst out in broad sheets from every door and window.

"The gay gardens were all trampled down and wasted, the greensward literally flooded with gore, and piled with the bodies of men, women, nay, even children—some dead already, some writhing in the death-pang, all slaughtered ruthlessly and almost unresisting, in the midst of harmless relaxation and light-hearted revelry. Most of these had been destroyed by the first fatal volley poured in upon them by the ambushed enemy, who had stolen upon their sports unsuspected. The women, all of whom were young, and many rarely beautiful, were clad in their gala dresses, with bare necks and bare arms, and high combs and floating vails, and garlands in their beautiful black hair. The men, a few of whom had been spared long enough to draw their swords in a vain attempt at resistance, were evidently thinking of anything but war when surprised by the exterminating thunder of the western rifle. Broken guitars and ladies' fans, and tables covered with refreshments and adorned with flowers, lay scattered here and there, overturned and broken, among the sadder relics of maimed and massacred humanity. Many large dogs, some the superb and faithful sheepdogs of the famous Mexican breed, lay slain beside their masters, faithful even to the death.

"But of the ruthless murderers—for even I can call them by no other name—not one had fallen. On the other side of the great court-yard barns and stables were blazing; and the appalling yell and cries which proceeded from them told how the poor domestic animals were perishing in agony within those fire-girdled walls. For a moment I looked around bewildered. There was not one living, conscious being, of whom I could ask a question, or learn whither had swept the bloody tide of attack and flight; for there were no sounds of resistance, nor even of terror and havoc, any longer, if it were not the roaring of the devastating conflagration and the appalling screams and bellowings of the tortured horses and oxen.

"Suddenly a pistol-shot or two startled me, followed by a shout and the clashing of swords from a distant quarter of the garden, sheltered by a rich grove of orange trees, in full bloom, and other shrubs of rare odoriferousness and beauty.

"I was still mounted, and with the speed of light I galloped toward the spot whence those sole sounds of human life proceeded. Across the smoothly-shaven lawn and luxuriant flower-beds I drove my charger recklessly, and the torn limbs and shattered stems of the beautiful

and fragrant shrubs told the fierce speed with which I forced my way through them. I came up. I was yet in time! It was a small, low building of two rooms, only, the inmost of which had windows reaching to the ground, secured with jalousies, and perfectly embowered by the rich leaves and vagrant tendrils of a hundred climbing parasites.

"And this lone bower, evidently the abode of some Spanish beauty, was now the last citadel of the hapless inhabitants, mercilessly attacked and desperately defended. It was fortunate for those within it that the Texans had discovered it from the court-yard, with which it communicated only by one door in a massive wall of stone—all its windows opening into the secluded quarter of the garden, which they had not as yet discovered.

"From the court-yard, separated from the garden in which I stood by the high and massive wall I have named, the shouts and rush of armed men came clearly to my ears; and, by the English tongue, the wild oaths, and the bitter denunciating, I readily perceived that it was the band of whom I was in pursuit, and that they were forcing their way into the building, in despite of all opposition. Still it was evident to me, by the silence which prevailed in the inner room—opposite to the casements of which I stood—that this last sanctum was yet unforced, though the rapid discharge of pistol and rifle shots, and the clash of rapier and bowie-knife at the door, announced that its security was menaced, and could not certainly be maintained many minutes longer.

"There was not a second to be lost. Springing down from my horse, with one pistol in my left hand, a second in my belt, my good broad-sword in my right hand, and my wood-knife between my teeth, I drove the frail jalousies aside with one blow of my foot, and stood the next moment in the scene of terror. And God of mercy! what a scene that was! Should I live centuries I never can forget it. It was but a second that I gazed around me; yet in that fleeting second I took in more minute details than I could recount to you in an hour; and so indelibly is every small particular engraved on the tablets of my memory that did I but possess the painter's art, I could lay them down, each and all, on canvas to the very life.

"The chamber was the sleeping-room of some young female; and the pure, spotless bed, with its snow-white drapery, the crucifix and holy water in a niche above the pillow, the exquisitely wrought mats on the floor, the walls curtained with needle-work and adorned with the finest works of Spanish art; the large, old-fashioned, deeply-cushioned chairs; the tables strewn with feminine implements, flowers, and books and implements of music; the very dim and mellowed twilight which alone penetrated the close jalousies and the dense foliage overshadowing them—all these suggested an idea, which words cannot convey, of pure, contented innocence, of refined, half-voluptuous luxury, mingled with the calm love of peaceful meditation and religious solitude. Yet this sweet spot was already the abode of death—might even be the scene of outrage worse than death.

"On the low, virgin bed was stretched—where it had been hastily deposited by the alarmed bearers—the lifeless corpse of an old man—an old Spanish gentleman; for none could look on the high, noble features, the broad, smooth, massive brow, and the snow-white, silky hair, which fell down in long curls beside his thin, wan cheeks, without feeling the conviction that he looked on all that was left of a high-minded and chivalrous gentleman. A small, round, livid hole in the center of his forehead, surrounded by a discolored spot, and the blood which had flowed from the back of his head and deluged all the cambric pillow-covers, showed plainly that he had fallen by the uncaring missile of a Texan rifle; while the placid expression of his features, and the smile on his wan lips, proved that he had been shot down in cold blood, when thinking of any thing rather than anger or hostility. I learned afterward that he was killed, in the very act of offering hospitality, by the first shot fired that day, on his own threshold; and I do not regret that the perpetrator of the atrocious deed fell, that same day, by my hand and this good weapon.

"But to proceed. On the floor, close to the window by which I made my entrance, lay stretched an aged woman, the wife, apparently, of him who slept unconscious—happy that he was unconscious—of the horrors which surrounded him. She, too, had been struck down, as I judged, not a moment before I entered, by a chance bullet; for she still breathed a little, although life was fast ebbling from her veins in spite of the efforts of the loveliest girl my eyes had then looked upon, who knelt beside her, seemingly unaware of the uproar which was raging, nearer and nearer every moment, in the adjoining apartment, the door of which stood wide open, allowing the horrid din, the hideous imprecations, and the blue sulphurous smoke of the death-shots, which rung incessantly without, to force their way, unhindered, into that quiet chamber.

"I said that one quick glance showed me all this, and, in truth, I had not leisure for a sec-

The Silent Rifleman.

ond, for I was not well within the chamber when a tall young Spaniard staggered back to the threshold of the door, and, discharging a pistol at the Texans while in the very act of dropping, fell headlong on the floor, his left hand, which still grasped the yet smoking pistol, striking the ground within a few inches of the feet of that fair girl. She started at the dreadful interruption, and, for the first time becoming aware of my presence, uttered a long, wild shriek; and, believing that her hour had come, arose to her feet with an effort, and laying her hand on her bosom, said, in a low, sweet voice, in the Spanish tongue: 'Strike, if you will; but, in the name of the most Holy Virgin, harm not an orphaned virgin!'

Alarmed by her cry a young gentleman richly dressed, who was defending the door, with rapier and dagger, with all the valor of despair; and whose back had been turned toward us, looked around quickly, and as he did so received a sharp wound in the breast from a Texan knife. The murderous weapon was raised to repeat the blow, when I seized him violently by the shoulder, cast him back into the middle of the room, crying 'Amigo,' and thrust myself into his place, confronting alone the insatiate assailants.

The men knew me in an instant, and seemed to anticipate my errand; for at first they all started back and lowered their weapons. Had he of whom we spoke been present at that moment the affair was ended; but he was in some other part of the premises, pursuing the fugitives, or urging on the destroyers; and it unfortunately so occurred, that the men before me were the very worst, and most dreadful ruffians of the troop. Their blood was up, moreover; and several of them to the intoxication of heated passions and unbridled license had added the intoxication of wine; quantities of which had been found on the premises, and had been drank without stint, to quench the fiery thirst engendered by the heat of indulged hatred and ungoverned fury.

It was in vain that I called on them to hold, and demanded their captain. My answer was, that they were all captains there alike, and would take no command from any, coupled to an insolent warning to take myself out of harm's way if I were wise, before worse should come of it. I am not myself of the gentlest or most pacific temper in the world; and opposition is wont to make me somewhat difficult to deal with. As one of those wretches came pressing upon me violently, I ordered him to stand off for a mutineer, he aimed a blow at me with his bowie-knife, and I retorted by shooting him through the head on the instant. Half a dozen set upon me, but not before my second pistol was out, and a second marauder stretched at my feet. Then at it we went, hand to hand; and what with my better arms—for my long, straight broadsword and wood-knife kept their short cutting blades easily at a distance—and what with the protection afforded me by the doorway within which I stood, I held them all at bay for ten minutes or better, without giving or taking a wound. I could have settled half a dozen of them without any trouble in the world, but I did not wish to imitate them, and acting on the defensive solely, I gave them time to take thought, and recover their coolness of mind.

By and by, finding they could not force me, and that exchanging cuts and thrusts without any result was but dry work, the rearmost of my assailants began to fall off, one by one, so that I was left with only three or four in front of me, and those awaiting only an opportunity to withdraw themselves without absolutely showing the white feather. This opportunity soon presented itself, for hearing the continued din and uproar from this small out of the way building the leader of the party, whose hot thirst for blood was already sated—to do him justice, his fits of rage are as transient as they are murderous—and who already had begun to repent the horrors he had perpetrated, came hastily that way.

A moment or two before he reached the spot, he was informed of my coming, and of the resistance I had met from his men; and the first thing I knew of his approach, was hearing his voice raised to its highest and fiercest tones. Whether he would come in, therefore, as a friend or a foe—whether he would hear reason, or resent my interference as an insult, was to me a matter perfectly doubtful and uncertain. The doubt, however, did not last long, for scarce had I distinguished the first accents of his angry voice, before he rushed into the room. There was blood on his face, on his hands, on the blade of his saber, which he bore still unsheathed. He was as pale as ashes; even his lips were white, not with fear nor with fury, but with the sick exhaustion that follows ever on the heel of over-fierce excitement. But so soon as his eye fell upon the group opposing me, and saw that I was fighting on the defensive, it seemed positively to flash fire—his white cheek gleamed with a red unnatural hectic—and he actually gnashed his teeth with rage. 'Rascals! Dogs! Mutineers!' he shouted. 'Do you dare to resist an officer? Down with them, Pierre; down with the dogs! Spare them no longer!

Give them the steel,' and suiting the action to the word, as the hindmost man of the party turned aghast at finding himself as it were between two fires, he threw himself upon him, and ran his sword through his body. The rest flung down their arms, and with some difficulty I obtained their grace, for he would hear at first of nothing but drum-head court-martial and immediate execution.

And now, my tale is told. That bower is the sole relic of a once rich and noble residence—that fair pale girl is, with the sole exception of her brother, who was the wounded youth I mentioned, the last scion of a race as noble as ever came from the shores of old Castile. Time has repaired the outward ruin, and the rich vegetation of this land of flowers has converted the smoke-blackened piles, which were once a palace, into pyramids of greenery and glowing blossoms. The devastation of a ruined heart what can repair? Marguerita dwells in her father's halls, once so proud, so happy, and so great, a lonely mourner, impoverished if not absolutely needy, without companions, friends or servants, except one aged couple and their son, a shepherd boy, who, absent with his flocks, escaped the massacre. Respect for her misfortunes, and shame, perhaps, for the barbarity of their maddened countrymen, renders her sacred to Americans. Among the Mexicans she is, of course, regarded as a martyr and an angel."

"Great God! can such things be, and not call down Heaven's thunder?" cried Julia, who had listened with indescribable anxiety to the wild tale.

"Ask, rather, what things cannot be, when the hounds of war and havoc are let slip—when the fiercest and most savage passions of the most fierce and untamed men are released from the restraints of society and law—when hot, animal courage is alone rewarded, alone regarded as a virtue, and the first of virtues—when whole nations, when grave, passionless men, when ministers of God's holy gospel, when delicate and lovely women vie with each other in bestowing honors and praise, *ta deums*—ay, and love itself on those whose sole title to their approbation is written in the blood of fellow-beings?"

"You speak eloquently, Partisan," replied the young dragoon, "perhaps truly; certainly as one feeling what he thinks. Yet you too, are a soldier."

"Perhaps I am aweary of the trade," he answered, gloomily, letting his head droop upon his chest; "or rather," he added, correcting himself, "I am a soldier no longer, though I wear a soldier's weapons. I buckled them on when my own country—for Texas was my country—was invaded; and, when its independence was secured, I laid them by, though not to rest, as needless. If you see me in arms now, it is that the wild spirit of adventure, which has become second life to me, urges me to the scenes where daring deeds are done, and where bold men encounter boldly. I might add, and I believe truly, that my presence in the field has done much since that day to allay, nothing to inflame, the atrocities of national animosity and invading warfare. My sword is rarely drawn now, except in defense of myself or of others, who, like yourselves, need my assistance; are you answered?"

"Answered sufficiently, at least, to see that I have no cause to regret, but much to rejoice at in the fact that, if you are not a soldier, you are still, at least, a Partisan."

"But, tell me," exclaimed Julia, who had listened rather impatiently to the late discussion—"her brother!—what became of her brother who was wounded—whom you saved?"

"What could become of him? He pulled his sombrero over his eyes, buckled his father's sword to his side, and his good spurs to his heel, took lance and lasso, backed his best horse, and never since has given quarter to a man who speaks with an English tongue. I would not bet a dollar that he would spare my life, if I fell into his hands in action."

"And have you never seen him since?"

"Twice; once we met in a sharp charge of horse—the same in which that captain of whom I told you, fell—and fell by Juan de Alava's hand; and then we crossed swords, and laid on loud, as the old ballads say, until we were separated in the melee. Again, when he was taken in the act of leading a squadron of our dragoons, disguised as a guide, into an ambuscade of Carrera's lancers. The noose was about his neck, I can tell you; and the other end of the rope was cast over the stout limb of a live oak. In two minutes more, had I not come up at the nick of time, the last heir male of the Alavas would have been dancing on a tight rope."

"And how, taken in a crime so flagrant, could ever your influence save him?"

"One life is no great boon, in return for a hundred and fifty. It was I warned the detachment, and saved all their throats from being cut, within ten minutes. Do you think the major, whose life and military reputation I had saved, was like to refuse me such a trifling as the life of a poor devil of a Mexican spy? He stared at me as though I were mad, when I asked it; but

when he saw that I was in earnest, he bade the troopers kick him out of the camp and let him go to the devil. I begged him off the kicking, to; and I believe he thought more of that than of my saving his sister or his life; at least, he shook my hand that time, which he had never done before, and bade 'God speed me!'"

"And where is he now, or how engaged?" asked Gordon.

"Since Romano Fallon's troop has been broken up, he is Padre Taranta's right hand man. He is the most dangerous enemy America now has in all Mexico."

"And it is to his sister's dwelling that you are leading me?" asked Julia, in astonishment.

"Even so, lady. If once you cross her thresh-old, you are safe against all the force of Mexico, until such time as we can bring you succor, or a flag under which you may enter the lines."

"For her, I can well believe you, Partisan; for she were no true woman, if she would not shed her heart's blood, ere you should scratch your finger; but what if he, what if this dread-ful brother should be there?"

"He is there, lady, with half Taranta's band. It was to his party that our captive was flying, when the Comanches slew him."

"And what shall save me, then—what shall save us all from the Spaniard's vengeance?"

"The Spaniard's honor, lady."

"And will you trust to so frail a chance?"

"So frail, lady!—the honor of an honorable man is stronger than the Gibraltar's rock. But were it frail as the frailest thing on earth, it is all that is left to which you can be trusted. To his protection I will commit you, reverentially be it spoken, rather than to any safeguard in the world, save that of the Most High."

"Then so will I," said Julia, cheerfully. "then so will I commit myself to it without a doubt. Will not you, Arthur?"

"It seems that we have no choice," he an-swered, gloomily, as if not altogether satisfied.

"If we had fifty, and the Partisan spoke thus, his choice would be my choice," replied Julia, firmly; and her slender form appeared to wax more majestic, and her innocent and dove-like features assumed a higher and more spirited meaning as she expressed her determination, filled, for the moment, with the impulse of ho-ric resolution.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUINED RANCHO.

THE moon by this time had risen, and already far above the horizon was beginning to pour her light into the shadowy recesses of the fores. The skies were as clear as a vault of the pure crystal, and the broad, round disk of the beaut-ful satellite, now well-nigh full, rode over them in perfect majesty, surrounded by a host of re-splendent stars.

But through the heavy foliage of the mighty live oaks, the tops of which, whenever any opening occurred in the thick woodland, might be seen, bathed in the pure, pallid luster, every leaf wet with the diamond dew-drops, twinkling and shivering in the soft air; scarcely a beam found its way to the soil from which they sprung. The nature of the soil itself was differ-ent from that which they had thus far traversed; and, in lieu of the deep, moist, black mold cov-ered with long rich grass, and giving birth to a thousand gorgeous flowers and luxuriant shrubs, the hoofs of the horses now turned up a thick and ponderous sand from beneath the scanty herbage, which thinly clad its arid surface.

Under the head of the Mexican noonday, when the breeze is asleep in its far chambers of the vaulted sky, the march through these ele-vated woods was toilsome and even painful to excess. The overburdened animals, sinking more than fetlock beneath the weight of their riders or their packs, the intolerable dust-wreath smoking up from beneath their tread, the torturing bites of envenomed insects, the smothering heat that broods ever undisturbed by a breath of air, beneath those green aisles, render a mid-day journey through that district an enterpri-se more difficult, if not so dangerous as a piligrimage across the parched waste of Sahara.

Beneath the coolness of the dewy night, and under the rays of the cold moon, the case is wide-ly different; and, when the little party again mounted their horses, restored by their short halt and re-invigorated by the forage which had been hastily collected for them, their pro-gress was once more rapid and less laborious than during any portion of their previous progress.

No sounds were to be heard but the light flut-ter of the breezy leaves, for the tramp of the horses was inaudible on the soft sandy road; and, had it not been for the occasional cry of some startled night-bird, or the hum of some chance insects, the voyagers might have imagined that, with the exception of themselves and their horses, there was not a living animal awa-e within the precincts of the great upland forest.

Throughout this wild tract, the ground beneath the canopy of the huge trees was bare and quite clear of underwood, so much so that squadrons of cavalry might have maneuvered between the gigantic stems, although the far-reaching boughs and evergreen foliage, exclud-ed even the glimmering moonlight, except where along the line of the narrow road they

were pursuing, an occasional gleam pierced through at distant intervals.

Along this road they had traveled without any occurrence to disturb or interrupt them, for about four hours since they halted, and although advancing only at an easy ambling canter, had traversed something better than twenty miles, when the distant barking of a large dog was distinctly heard by all the party, and within a few minutes after that sound became audible, the advanced dragoon, who was a hundred or two yards ahead of the party, reined up and informed the Partisan that a heavy body of horse were coming down the road rapidly toward them.

Scarcely, indeed, had the man spoken before the truth of his report was evident. For, as he halted instantly on the receipt of the unwelcome tidings, the clang of stirrups and scabbards became at once audible, and the quick ear of the Partisan enabled him almost immediately to form a shrewd conjecture as to their numbers.

The road, a little way above the spot where they stood, made an abrupt elbow to avoid the gully of a brook, the waters of which could be heard gurgling faintly over the pebbles, and wound to and fro so as nearly to form a letter S, a line drawn through which would not have exceeded half a mile in length, while the measure of all its sinuosities would easily have exceeded thrice that distance.

"There are above a hundred of them," said Pierre, after listening for a moment, "and it is sure enough they are coming right down upon us. Fortunate is it for us that the road is not straight, or they would have been down on us before we suspected it. As it is we can be safe enough before they come thus far, and yet we have little time to lose. Hold up your sabers, my men, that they do not strike your spurs or stirrups, and follow me in single file. Let me have a hand on your bridle-rein, lady. Gordon, close up behind us, we must trot."

And with the word, pricking his horse lightly with the spur, he turned the head of Julia's palfrey short to the right hand, and leaving the beaten track, plunged without hesitation into the depths of the forest. For a hundred yards, or better, the ground which they crossed was entirely level, but at the end of this distance it became broken and uneven, and the roar of rapid water sounded nearer and nearer at every step.

Darker and darker grew the forest, as they proceeded and descended, and as they neared the banks of the torrent the ground became interspersed with single shrubs, and then with scattered patches of brake and bushes, until at the margin of the turbulent water a dense fringe of continuous underwood was visible.

Before they reached this, however, and within a quarter of a mile of the road itself, Pierre halted, and telling Julia that there was no danger, and desiring the men not to stir from the spot, or speak, or call out, whatever they might hear or see, dismounted from his horse, cast the rein to a dragoon, and then hurried back on foot, as fast as he could, directly toward the track which they had just left.

Treading the soft earth with a noiseless step, and availing himself of the covert of every bush, every stem, every inequality of the ground, he soon contrived to worm his way to the very edge of the road, along which the cavalry they had heard was in full march.

He had scarcely thrown himself down on the grass at a spot where in consequence of some trifling moisture it grew longer and ranker than elsewhere, before the increasing clatter and clang announced the approach of the horsemen, and the next moment a long line of bright sparks of fire became visible, undulating as they followed the sweep of the road, and agitated gently up and down by the swift motion of the horses.

"Just as I thought, guerrillas?" muttered the Partisan to himself; "even Mexican regulars would scarce be smoking thus on a forced night march, as this must be; for they can scarce expect any work to do, or any enemy to surprise within fifty miles of this or better. But patience! patience! we shall soon know their game, for by heaven! they are talking as if each man had two tongues. It is Juan de Alava's squadron, for a thousand!"

Scarcely had he ceased from speaking, or rather thinking within himself, for although his ideas almost formed themselves into actual sentences, they were by no means formed in articulate words, when the body of irregular horse began to file past him, in loose order, three or four sometimes riding abreast, and at other times each cavalier singly, and that too with considerable intervals between. Just when they passed him there was an opening in the treetops, and the moonlight streaming down through it in a pencil of bright yellow luster which was contrasted splendidly against the surrounding shadows, and which, the Partisan judged truly, would render the darkness of the forest around only the more intense to those who viewed it from that focus of illumination.

The spot of the road on which this clear light fell was but two or three yards beyond at the most, and as man after man rode into it out of the shadow on the one hand, glanced in

revealed, to the minute details of his dress and accoutrements for a moment, and was again lost in the gloom beyond—the sight was beyond conception strange, savage and exciting.

The wild, active little horse, the huge hats, and long, jet-black, elf-locks of the riders, their many-colored blankets and ponchos, and the flash of the positive armory which each trooper bore about him, composed a picture worthy the pencil of Salvator.

The red gleam of their cigars as they drew them, now and then, into a keener radiance with their breath, flashed luridly up over their swarthy features, and disclosed some of them so fully that the Partisan even recognized the faces of individuals whose names and deeds were familiar to his ears.

The squadron was perhaps ten minutes or a quarter of an hour passing him, for there were, as he had conjectured by the sound, while they were yet at a distance, above a hundred of them—in fact, he reckoned about a score beyond that number—and they rode, as I have said, in very open order, and not much faster than a foot-pace.

Pierre listened to every word that fell from their lips, as if his life depended on his catching the import of what they said, but for a long time it was all in vain. For though he lay so close to the speakers as to catch every syllable, and understood their tongue perfectly, the riders either knew not the object of their own march or cared not to converse about it. Their dismally talk was to the Partisan, mere jargon, at times containing sentiments of gross ribaldry and licentiousness, or anticipations of massacre and plunder, which made the heart of the listener bound in his breast with indignant anger.

At last, when a hundred and twenty men, all armed with the lance and long, straight two-edged sword, all having the formidable lasso coiled up at the saddle-bow, and the most of them having two escopetas, or short, heavy, ounce-balled carbines, slung at their sides, had filed past him in succession, a longer interval occurred in the line than he had hitherto observed, and thinking that they were all gone, and that the danger was at an end, he was on the point of rising to his feet. It was well for him, however, that he did not do so, for, when he had actually raised himself to his knees the tramp of two horses at a gallop struck his ear suddenly, and he had barely the time to conceal himself again in the grass before the two horses were within arm's length of him.

The next glance showed him that his life had not been worth a dollar's purchase, had he fully arisen to his feet, for he needed nothing to tell him that the eyes of the two who now passed him—eyes wandering suspiciously at every step of their horses through the forest about them—were very different to encounter from those of the mere troopers who had hitherto passed by him.

These two men were of a widely different aspect from the rest, and from each other also, though one of them was clad, except that the materials were richer, in the same costume with the men who preceded him.

The other, who rode a little the foremost of the two and the nearest to the Partisan, was a little old shriveled man, not above the middle height, and worn down almost to the emaciation of a living skeleton, between the fatigues of war and exposure to weather. Yet within that frail and meager frame, hardened as it was and exercised into a mere mass of compact bone and sinew, it was easy to perceive that there resided a world of untamed youthful spirit, and all the strength of manhood.

He sat a fine black horse, which arched its neck against the curb proudly, seemed to be fighting all the time against the hand which controlled it with all the elastic strength and easy vigor which are natural to twenty years, but at three score and ten seem almost miraculous.

And yet from his thin wrinkled face, his bird-like hand—for he rode gloveless—the aged stoop of his shoulders, as he bowed over his saddle-bow, and the snow-white hair which escaped from beneath his broad-leaved hat, the long mustache and peaked vandyke beard, all of the same wintry hue, it was evident that his earthly pilgrimage had been prolonged already beyond the term which the Psalmist assigns to the strongest of the sons of men.

His dress was a closely fitted sack-shaped coat or tunic, barely descending to his saddle, and buttoned up to his very throat with large jet buttons. A broad white band or collar was folded squarely over it at the neck, and gave a singular character, half-clerical, half-puritanical, to the figure which was little in keeping with the keen hard impressive features, or with the weapons which bore. Loose black breeches, not far different from the trunk-hose of Cromwell's time, with a pair of cavalry boots equipped with heavy spurs, and a broad brimmed, high-crowned, black hat, completed his attire. For arms, from his girdle of black leather there hung a light English saber with a steel scabbard and ivory handle, such as was carried many years ago, and in his holsters a pair of carbines, pistol, i the rear, i the side, i the

ric, but he bore neither lance nor lasso, nor was there any escopeta at his side.

The young man who accompanied him was a tall, handsome, powerful figure, deep-chested and thin-flanked, and showing prodigious powers both of offense and endurance. His high gray hat glittered with massive ornaments of silver; his velvet jacket was profusely laced with gold, and the large buckskin pantaloons, open from the knee downward, were decorated with a double row of golden filigree buttons, hanging like bullets along the seam. His poncho, which was strapped behind his saddle, was of the very finest texture, and the brightest color; and all the weapons which he bore, though in character and form precisely similar to those of the men, were of the finest fabric, and in the best condition.

"Now, padre," exclaimed the younger, "for the love of God! let us set spurs to our horses and get the troop forward at a quicker pace. At this rate, we shall not reach the open ground before daybreak; and, in that case, they will have the start of us."

"Not so, not so, Juan," replied the old man, in a clear, hard voice. "If our information be correct, and there be a lady with them, as I doubt not it is, they will have halted for the night, and the later we come upon the ground, the more chance of finding them. I know a little of the habits of these English and American ladies, for they are pretty much the same, I fancy. I have seen more than one or two of them in Spain; and it took as many men to escort one of them, and wait on her pleasure, as would have guarded a battery, or a train of specie. No, no, my lad, we will not blow our horses; it is the slow thrower who makes the sure winner."

They continued speaking as they rode along; but these were all the words that reached the ears of the Partisan. Nor more did he require, however, to inform him of all that he wished to know. It was their own party of whom the rancheros were in search, informed probably by an express from Carrera, of the direction which they were supposed to have taken, and ignorant as yet of the vicinity of the Comanches, who but rarely advanced so far into the interior.

So soon as the clatter of their passage had died away into the ordinary silence of the woods, the Partisan hurried back to join his friends, who were awaiting his return in no small anxiety, at least, not to say trepidation.

"All is well!" he exclaimed as soon as he came into ear-shot of the little party: "all is well. Better even than I expected. It is Padre Taranta, and young Juan de Alava, with the best troop I have yet seen of guerrillas. Pretty men, and well mounted. They are in search of us, too, having received notice of our being on the prairie, and not knowing anything about the Comanches."

"And do you call that good news?" cried Gordon in surprise.

"Of course, I do. In the first place, we shall find the rancho ungarrisoned, and little Marguerita at liberty to receive us as she will. And, in the second—even if they do not meet the Indians, and fall foul of them—they have got at least a three days' scout before them. For this is the last place on the face of the wide world, where they would think to look for us; and, long before they can return, I will have rifles enough here to beat them into the Bravo, if they should dare to attack us. But come, let us move. We are but a mile or two distant from the rancho."

No sooner said than done. They hastened back to the main road, and, relieved now from the necessity of so much caution, cantered forward at a better pace than they had as yet ventured on trying. Half an hour's riding brought them to the banks of the rivulet which divided the clear grounds that surrounded the once splendid estate from the wild forest.

Over the open fields, now all overgrown with bushes, and overrun with creeping vines and wild flowers, and over the once trim and well-kept gardens, now a rank wilderness of neglected sweets and unkempt verdure, the cold moon, now declining toward the horizon, poured her slant rays with a sad melancholy lus'er, as if she grieved over the desolation of the scene.

Many tall shattered piles of building, completely overrun with luxuriant foliage of unnumbered parasitical plants, stood here and there in the wide area spread before their eyes, all silvered at the edges by the dewy moonlight; but not a single beam could fall upon the one low, lonely building, which alone remained habitable in that scene of ruthless devastation, so thickly was it overshadowed by the superb trees which, by their friendly shelter, had saved it from destruction.

A solitary owl was hooting wild and shrill from one of the ruins, as they rode into what had once been the great court of the rancho, and paused for a moment to water their horses at a stone basin in which once a tall fountain had played brilliantly, but no other sound, betokening life of man or beast, reached their ears.

A minute or two afterward, however, as the hoofs of their horses began to clatter on the pavement, a horse laying back upon the still-

ness of the night, and two huge-sheep dogs, of the far-famed Mexican breed, came bounding out, furious, as if to attack the intruders.

But the Partisan spoke to them sharply, calling them by their names, and, at the instant, they ceased baying, and cowered before his horse's feet, fawning and whimpering with delight, as if rejoiced to welcome an old friend.

Then, as if aroused by the uproar, some one was heard to stir within the rancho, a light flashed through one of the casements, which was immediately afterward thrown open—a loud voice hailing to inquire who came so late, and a long glittering musket-barrel being protruded in stern menace from the lattice.

"Friend, friend!" cried the Partisan, in the Spanish tongue. "It is I, Sanchez; it is Pedro, the Forester."

"Thanks be to God!" shouted the old man, who had spoken from within; "welcome, senor! Wait till I open the door for you."

The lattice was pulled to, as he ceased speaking; but they could hear him hallooing from within to arouse his mistress and the scanty household.

"Ho! senorita, senorita! Ho! rise, arise! It is he, it is he, who comes with good fortune. It is he, Senorita Marguerita; he, Pedro, the Forester, Pedro el Salvador!"

A moment afterward, the bolts were withdrawn and the gate thrown open, and the lady, with her conductors, entered the ruined rancho.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARGUERITA.

The first sight which met the eyes of Julia Gordon, as she crossed the threshold of the door, and stood within the hall of that lovely dwelling, was the figure of a young, delicate, tall girl, who struck her, at the first glance, as being the very loveliest creature she had ever looked upon. And indeed she was exceeding lovely.

You might have searched the wide world over, and scarce found two such beings as those, thus strangely brought together, types of two different races—models of two contrasted forms of beauty—from the extreme east to the furthest west.

Julia Gordon, the perfection of the glorious, glowing womanhood of the all-conquering Anglo-Norman strain, and Marguerita de Alava, of the once mighty Gothic race of Spain.

The two stood, for the moment, struck with a sort of half-fearful wonder and wild admiration. And, if the Spanish maiden was actually dazzled—as if a creature of another sphere had stood before her, face to face—by the voluptuous outlines of the young wife's form, displayed as they were by the close-fitting bodice and light sleeves of her riding-habit; by the unrivaled brilliancy of her exquisite complexion; by the soft yet pervading radiance of her beautiful blue eyes; by the rich silky masses of her disheveled auburn hair, flowing in loose, long ringlets from beneath the broad brim of her beaver hat, scarce less did the fair American marvel at the slight symmetry of the Spanish maiden, and the rare beauty of her classic features.

Like Julia, Marguerita was far taller than the majority of her sex. Like Julia's her waist was scarce a span in circumference; her falling shoulders splendidly arched; her lower limbs richly developed; but, unlike Julia's, her pale, clear, colorless, olive complexion, without a hue of carnation on her cheek, yet showing, in its peach-like softness and mellow, golden tinge the warmth and healthfulness which filled her veins; her high, pale forehead, with the twin arches of her lustrous brows; the long, large, swimming eyes, half-languor and half-fire, flashing out from beneath the silken fringes of her deep jetty lashes; the thin, straight, classic nose; the small, voluptuously-pouting mouth, shaped like the bow of Cupid; the softly-rounded chin—all combined to make up a picture—which nothing earthly could surpass—of the half-oriental beauty of the high race of Spain.

It was clear that she had but an instant started from her bed, for her small feet, which were white as those of that praised queen whom the rhapsodist has immortalized as the silver-footed, were all unsandaled, and as they pressed the dark marble of the uncarpeted floor, they shone as brightly out as if they had been modeled of the purest alabaster.

She wore a long, loose robe of white linen, with many falling ruffles about the bosom, which was cut somewhat low, displaying all her ivory, swan-like neck, and a large portion of her maiden bust. No corsage or stiff bodice confined the contour of her slender waist, or controlled the billowy play of her supple and elastic form; but below, a short petticoat of very full black silk was tied tightly about her waist, having a deep lace fringe hanging down from its upper edge, and reaching but a little way below her knees, beneath which the white under-dress fell in large draperies, deeply flounced and ruffled, quite to her ankles.

Her exquisitely-modeled and fully-rounded arms were bare quite to the shoulders, but neither on them, nor on her neck or bosom, were

there any ornaments or jewels, unless a rosary of ebony beads, with every here and there a single brilliant glittering among them, supporting a magnificently sculptured crucifix of gold, which hung loosely over her shoulders, can be called an ornament.

In her left hand she carried a small lamp, which was the only light in the large apartment; and in her right—strange contrast to her delicate form and timid, virgin air—there flashed clear in the lamplight the sheathless blade of a long, keen stiletto.

She stood for a moment, as I have said, amazed, and, it would seem, almost awe-struck, by the strange loveliness of her unexpected visitor; but in the next, seeing that there was no danger to be apprehended, she dropped the dagger quietly upon the table, nigh to which she stood, set down the lamp beside it, and advanced with an air of calm, yet courteous dignity to meet her strange guests.

"I will not ask," she said, in tones breathing the very soul of harmony, using the pure, Castilian tongue, "I will not ask whence you come, beautiful lady, or wherefore, nor of what race you are, for it is night, and there is no dwelling near, and you are young and delicate as you are fair, and our wild forests are no place for youth or beauty. You are welcome, lady, most welcome, to the last ruined roof that war has left to Marguerita de Alava. Again you are most welcome to all the hospitality my poor roof can offer."

It seemed that she had not distinguished the words of old Sanchez, when he shouted to arouse her from her slumbers; for, as the Partisan advanced, who had stood hitherto in the background, and had been concealed by the darkness which pervaded the whole room, with the exception of the little space immediately around the lamp of Marguerita, she started, as if in terror, at first, and turned as pale as ashes, but the next moment her cheek, brow, neck and bosom flushed crimson; nay, her very hands and arms were incarnadined, even to the very finger-ends, as she sprung eagerly forward to greet him.

"You! you!" she cried, fervently; "do my eyes tell me truly? Is it, indeed, you? Lord of my life! friend of my soul! preserver of my honor! is it, indeed, you, Pedro el Salvador? Oh, God be thanked, and Mary, the most holy, that you are here beneath the roof which, but for you, would have been now a pile of ashes. Heaven send that you may have come asking something at my hands, that I may prove the depth, the everlasting and undying strength, of a poor Spanish maiden's gratitude. Oh! I am happy—oh, very, very happy!"

And, as she spoke, in the intensity of her passionate feelings, she clasped her snowy arms about the rough soldier's neck, and letting fall her Madonna-like head on his iron shoulders, burst into a flood of tears.

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the gallant rover, gently disengaging himself from the innocent girl's embrace; "nay, nay, weep not, sweet Senorita; this is no time for tears"—he spoke in the Spanish tongue, which he used with fluency, and with a very pure dialect—"for I have indeed come to ask a favor—a favor as great as the lives of us all!"

"Ask for my life, rather," she answered, emphatically, suffering the tears to trickle down her cheeks unheeded, "for it is yours; ask for my soul; you should have it, were it mine to bestow; ask for all, except my honor—which I know to be impossible."

"Impossible, indeed, Marguerita," replied the Partisan. "But, listen to me, and first look upon this beautiful young woman."

"She is beautiful," replied Marguerita, without so much as turning her eyes toward Julia Gordon, and as she spoke, a strange, wild expression crossed her pale features. "She is beautiful; what of her?"

"She is of the race, Marguerita, on earth, the most hostile to your own—she is an American! Nay, more; she is the child of a soldier! the wife of a soldier! the wife of one of those who are here to carry the sword into your people's ranks—the fire into your people's dwellings—to devastate, perhaps to subjugate, your land!"

"What more, Don Pedro? You said all that, when you said American, unless, indeed, you had added volunteers," she continued, with a smile half scornful, half sarcastic, "which she can scarcely be. What more of her, Don Pedro?"

"She is a woman, as you see, young, delicate and beautiful, and timid by her very nature. She married the choice of her heart."

"Happy girl!" sighed the Spanish maiden; but Pierre proceeded, as if he had not observed the interruption.

"And he is a soldier. She left home, friends, wealth, rank, luxurious comforts, all that makes life most pleasant, to traverse the howling forests, and the desolate prairies, to swim bridgeless rivers, to sleep beneath the untended heavens, to follow him she loved, whither his duty and his country's orders called him! She has been hunted these three days, in peril such as woman rarely has encountered, and borne that peril as men rarely bear it; chased by Carrera's horse, beleaguered by the terrible Comanches, and, within the last hour, all but surprised

by the padre's guerrillas. Had any of these taken her, you know her fate, Marguerita."

"Add one word more, Don Pedro; say that she is your wife!" said the girl, in a singular tone of half-resentful vehemence, which Pierre did not then comprehend.

"She is the wife of my friend, Lieutenant Gordon, lady," he replied; "no volunteer, I assure you, but one of May's dragoons."

"But you love her!" she again exclaimed, almost fiercely scrutinizing her large earnest eyes, as if she would have read his soul.

"As my sister, Marguerita," replied the start soldier, simply. "But to what tends all this? She must die, nor die only, but suffer that which to honorable minds is more dreadful than a thousand deaths, unless you save her."

"I save her—I—I—her whom you love!"

"I should have thought that would have been a cause the more, why you should do so," replied the veteran, who, with the singular simplicity and innocence which formed a part of his character, did not in the least suspect what was evident enough both to Gordon and to Julia, the reason of her strange manner. "But I have erred, it seems, in nothing more than in my estimate, it would appear," he added, contemptuously, "of the depth, the truth, the everlasting and undying strength of a Spanish maiden's gratitude; come, my friends, I have erred, it seems, and led you into error. Come, we will trust to our swords for safety, or, if we must needs seek hospitality, henceforth we will seek it in the skin tents of the Comanches."

While he spoke thus, the Spanish girl stood silent and motionless as a statue, with her fair neck bent, and her beautiful eyes fixed on vacancy, with one hand pressed almost convulsively upon her heart, and the other hanging down listlessly by her side. But when he ceased speaking, she stepped quickly forward, and caught him by the arm, as he turned to go; and then it was evident that of all he had said, the first words only had struck her ear, or made an impression on her mind.

"You are right," she said, in a cold, mournful voice; "you are right, Pedro. It is a cause the more—and I am—it matters not what! Mea culpa! mea culpa!" she cried, breaking off suddenly, "pray for me, Holiest Maria; pray for me!" Then turning to Julia, and taking her hand, which she raised to her lips, "Pardon me," she said, "pardon me, dear lady; but at times I am half distraught, and my mind wanders, I know not how or whither since—since that day—but he has told you, doubtless. In one word, you are welcome! You are as safe as if you were within the temple of your God! You are alone, you are in danger, he loves you, and I doubt not you love him; and I, Marguerita de Alava, swear it, by all the saints of Heaven! that I will die, before one hair of your head, one nail of your finger be injured! But this," she continued, after a moment's pause, "this is poor hospitality. Without there! Sanchez, Estefania, bring lights, and wine, and pile up the fire; the nights are chilly here among our forests."

The old shepherd, who had been awaiting her commands without, marveling evidently at the long delay ere he was summoned, appeared instantly bearing a pair of tall waxen candles, almost torches in size, in two massive candlesticks of different patterns, but of great value, and elaborate antique workmanship.

A woman, apparently of extreme age, but still vigorous and active, followed him, carrying a tray, covered with a clean white napkin, on which was a tall cut-glass flagon, and several glasses of various forms and patterns, and a plate or two of cakes and sweetmeats.

Meantime the door was closed and secured, charcoal was supplied bountifully to the half-extinguished stove, and in a minute or two the large room, lately so cavernous and cold, was filled with a genial warmth, and illuminated to its remotest angles by the soft light of the large candles.

It took less time to effect this change than it has taken to describe it; and that short time was consumed in whispered conversation between the two young women, and the exchange of a quick glance or two between the Partisan and Gordon, the latter of whom clearly understood a part—though he was far from comprehending as he fancied he did—of that strange by-play which had preceded their late welcome.

The Partisan then left the room for a minute or two, to give some instruction to the dragoons; for, in the present crisis, Gordon had delegated the command to him; while the young husband drew near to the stove, unwilling to quit Julia and more than half suspicious of the Spanish lady's motives.

So soon, however, as the girl's eye fell upon her own scanty attire, revealed as it was now by the bright luster of the candles, she started, as if she had but the instant remembered how slenderly she was clad; blushed crimson, and raising both her hands to conceal her half-unclothed bosom, turned quickly and fled with a swift step into the inner chamber.

"Strange! this is very strange, Julia," exclaimed the young dragoon, as his eye, after following Marguerita's flight, returned to the innocent and gentle features of his own lovely

wife. "She is the strangest girl I ever saw. She is either mad or wicked—if not both."

"Not one of the three," answered his young wife, with a gay, artless smile. "I thought you were a better judge of women's manners, if not of women's minds. She is in love; that is all!"

"No, that is not all, Julia," replied Gordon, "and I might retort your hint, but that I know you are too quick not to have seen that she is jealous, also." And there was something in the tone, and in the expression of his eye, as he spoke, that seemed to inquire, "and is she so without a cause?"

"Jealous of me, Arthur?" she exclaimed, blushing deeply as she said these words; and he observed the blush, but observed not the indignant tone in which she spoke.

"Is that a blush of consciousness, or of shame, Julia?" he said, after a moment's pause, gazing at her sternly.

"Of indignation!" she answered, vehemently, her soft blue eyes flashing fire as she answered him. "Of indignation, sir, that any man should dare use such words, entertain such thought of me—my God! my God! of me—who have left—but it matters not!" she added, checking her ex-postulation, and speaking firmly in that low concentrated tone which shows far more the depth of wounded feelings than the angriest and loudest vehemence. "It matters not, sir; for you are no more capable of judging the honor of an honorable man, than of estimating the love of a true woman. Yes, Arthur Gordon, she is both in love and jealous. I saw that at a glance; and I will tell you something more; she is not jealous without a cause. Is your glance answered? For the man whom she loves, does not love her, and *does* love me!"

"By heaven! this is too much!" cried Gordon, stamping his foot furiously on the ground, and grasping the hilt of his saber; "must I bear this? Are my hands tied?"

"You must! They are!" she replied, curtly and sternly. "This, and more, you must bear. He loves me passionately, madly—with a love that I fear will last out his life! nay! I believe as you never did, never could love woman! He loved me from the very moment he first set eyes on me; it was long ere he knew it—he scarce knows even now *how* he loves me!"

"As a sister, doubtless!" answered Arthur Gordon, with a sneer; yet so far now impressed by her manner, that he was satisfied there was neither guile in her words, nor guilt in her heart, although he could not comprehend to what she was coming.

"No, sir. Not as a sister—as a saint, rather! As a zealot adores the saint of his devotion—as a poet adores the creation of his fancy, passionately, sir, yet which you cannot understand—purely! He would die, sir, to win my love; yet he would die twenty times, nay, he would see me dead, rather than see me, much less render me, a thing unworthy of his love! and I would rather die, Arthur Gordon, than have him fancy for a moment, as you fancy now, that I could love him, could entertain one passing feeling toward any man that were unconsonant with honor as a woman, with duty as a wife! Now are you answered?"

The young man spoke not, stirred not, answered not, even with the mute language of the eye. He stood abashed, crestfallen, dumb before her. Conviction was borne in upon his soul by every word she uttered. Confusion smote him as the false accuser; shame and remorse held him silent.

"Your silence speaks," she said, after gazing in his face nearly a minute; "I am answered. Now listen to me, Arthur Gordon. I trust, I know, I thank my God! I am too proud, if not too pure, ever to do the thing that should make me know what shame is. But, mark me; if there be aught on earth which alienates love, it is to be suspected of not loving. If there be aught on earth that engenders evil thoughts in the heart, it is to be suspected capable of evil thinking. If there be aught on earth that makes a woman doubt herself, it is to be doubted by him who should sustain her; if once she doubts herself, others will soon have cause to doubt, to despise her. If I were not so proud, I should say to you, therefore, 'Make me not that which you would not have me!' I am too proud, too strong, too confident in the right to say so. But I do say, 'Make me not scorn you, cast you away from me, hate you.' I could do all those things, Arthur Gordon, and, though they kill me, I will do them, if ever more I hear from your tongue or see in your eye a doubt of my honor—or of my love. I have said enough—should have said too much had I not seen in you aforetime the germs of this folly, which, if not nipped in the bud, will make you, will make both of us indeed wretched. Now I will go and join our hostess; and do you seek the Partisan and decide upon our future movements."

He raised his eyes slowly to meet her glance, and as he met it no longer fiery or indignant, but full of confidence and love, a faint smile played over his lips, and he stretched out his arms half timidly toward her, with this one word—

"Julia!"

And she refused not the proffered embrace,

but fell on his bosom and kissed him tenderly; and then withdrawing herself gently from his arms, said, with her own bright, beaming smile—

"Now go—go your way, silly boy—and beware how you let that noble man perceive your folly."

"He should not, for my life!" answered the young dragoon, as with a light heart, a firm step, and a mind perfectly reassured and easy, he went forth by one door into the court-yard as she passed by the other into Marguerita's boudoir.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING SUPPER.

WHEN Arthur Gordon issued out into the quiet court-yard, he found the Partisan tranquilly superintending the preparations of the dragoons, who had already lighted a fire near the fountain and having rubbed down their chargers, which were busy about better provenance than they had enjoyed for many a day, were now making their arrangements for the night.

"I have taken all necessary precautions," he said, as the young lieutenant approached him. "Your lady's baggage and her palfrey must be left here, and the latter will be tended by my good friend Francisco here, who has promised to look after her. The spare dragoon horse has been shot already by my orders. I have reduced your men to the lightest marching order, and we must be off within two hours."

"What are your plans? Are we all to move together?—cannot one of us, you or I, or one of the men, at least, remain to protect her?"

"Impossible! nay, it were worse than impossible—it were actual, utter madness! Without me, you could not find your way ten miles, nor would you know which way to turn in the forests through which I shall guide you. Without you, the dragoons would turn mutinous! Even now they are half sullen, and disinclined to obey me. Moreover, one man, or ten, for that matter, would be powerless to defend her, while their presence would but breed suspicion and induce discovery."

"I suppose you are right," said the young soldier, musing deeply. "Yet it is dreadful—dreadful to leave her here alone and undefended!"

"Undefended! I say nay to that. She is better defended by the truth and loyalty, and gratitude of that young Spanish maiden, than by a score of broadswords."

"I do not know," said Gordon, pondering; "I am not so sure of that truth and loyalty of which you speak."

"I will pledge my honor! I would stake my soul upon them!" said the Partisan, eagerly.

"Ay!" answered the young officer, still half abstracted, and busy about his own thoughts—"ay! but you are by no means clear-sighted!"

"I—I not clear-sighted!" exclaimed the Partisan, actually startled out of his wonted gravity of manner. "If not I, I should like to know who the devil is clear-sighted! Why, I can see as far with my naked eye as you can with your finest glass; and my rifle—"

"Is as true as your heart, Partisan," interrupted Gordon, laughing in spite of the gravity of his own heart and the dark aspect of affairs around them; "but that is not what I meant at all. I meant your clear-sightedness as to women. You know absolutely nothing about them. You have not seen what all of us saw at a glance. This pretty Marguerita loves you, Pierre, and—"

"Loves—me!"

"Ay! with the whole depth, and strength and intensity of a Spanish woman's heart. Ay! and as every Spanish woman does, who loves at all, she loves you almost to distraction, and is jealous of you, almost to madness."

"You are mad, I believe," replied Pierre Delacroix, gravely. "I never heard such nonsense in all my life. Why, I am old enough to be her father, and rough enough to be a bear. How the devil should any woman, let alone one so young and soft, and beautiful, love such an one as I? And jealous, too! I should like to know of whom she can be jealous."

"Of Julia."

"Of your wife? Oh! you are mad. Why, she knows she is your wife. I told her so myself. You will make me mad next. Why, I never spoke ten words to the girl in my life."

"I don't care if you had never spoken one. I tell you Julia knows it as well, sees it as plainly as I do."

"Knows what?—sees what?"

"Knows and sees that Marguerita de Alava loves you, and is jealous of her."

"I suppose you will tell me next that I am in love with both of them, and both of them with me!" cried the old soldier, who was now becoming half indignant. "By the Lord! I believe that you are making mockery of me."

"On my honor! my good friend, it is not so. I pray you, I beseech you, hear me. We have the highest trust, the most unbounded faith in your wisdom, your bravery, your honor, your sagacity, in so far as men are concerned; but I doubt your perspicacity with women. Now it is certain that she loves you, and is jealous of

my wife—whom, as God is my judge, I would trust to your care, unhesitating, to guide and guard her all alone, through miles and miles of wilderness! Now, grant that this is true—can she be trusted? Will not her jealousy of Julia outweigh her gratitude to you? Will she not betray her to rid herself of a rival?"

"I don't know," answered the Partisan, gravely, with the air of a man on whose mind some new light was dawning. "I know nothing of the mind of woman. If she is capable of loving me herself, and of suspecting me of loving your wife otherwise than as a sister, I should think she must be capable of anything."

Again Gordon could scarce refrain from laughing at the singular simplicity and want of comprehension on the part of one, in other respects, so shrewd and so sagacious. But he could only answer—"Your own sincerity and virtue, Pierre, blind you, it seems, to half the wickedness and folly of this world. For the rest, women often see further into women's hearts than men."

"And does Julia Gordon, does your wife see this—which you think you see—in the heart of Marguerita?"

"Pierre Delacroix, she does."

"Then ask her if she thinks her worthy to be trusted. I'll none of it—I think you are all mad together."

"That advice, at least, I will follow," said Gordon. "They have been alone together now nearly an hour. Let us go in and speak with them."

And as he said the words, the door opened, and the old shepherd made his appearance and called on them to enter, for the supper was served.

They instantly obeyed the summons, chiming as it did with their previous intention, and in a moment were again in the presence of their fair hostess, and her no less beautiful guest.

Both the young women had altered their dress, the Spanish girl having arrayed herself in the peculiar and becoming garb of her country, all black from head to foot, with the high comb and flowing vail, silk petticoat and lace mantilla, and all that beseemed a maiden of high birth and breeding; while Julia had merely laid aside her riding hat and re-adjusted her disordered ringlets. Both looked, however, surpassingly beautiful, and it might well have been a matter of doubt, which bore away the belle, although so different in character and style of beauty.

It was a singular scene. The large marble paved unfurnished hall, with its unadorned plaster walls, and the great black oaken beams overhead, without a curtain to the tall tassements, or a carpet on the marble floor, would have been the very picture of desolation and even poverty, had it not been for the gayly colored cloaks and blankets, the plumed hats, and glittering weapons, the silver-plated saddles and polished bridles which hung here and there from the large stag-antlers attached to the heavy joists which upheld the roof. Even more than these, however, though they flashed and flickered merrily in the red light of the charcoal stove, in the yellow blaze of the waxen torches, and in the pale beams of the now setting moon, all these strangely contrasted, did the supper table and its appendages give an appearance of comfort, almost of wealth and luxury, to what had been otherwise most bare and barren.

The board, which was large enough to accommodate ten or twelve persons, was spread with damask of unsullied brightness; the forks, the candlesticks, the covers, were all of massive silver: the glass was all of the finest quality, and Spanish wine was displayed on the table, and several chargers smoked with the favorite of national dishes, while bread of ivory whiteness and fruits of many kinds, choice and rare in our northern climes—things in ordinary use—were piled in pyramids on plates of gilded silver.

In strange contrast to this appearance of solidity and wealth, were the scanty costumes, the unshodden feet, the age, the decrepitude, and the poverty of the two servitors, who now alone waited upon the last heiress of the once proud house of De Alava.

But not more proudly, nor with a loftier and more stately dignity of air and aspect, could the courtliest senora of that house have welcomed guests to her board in the palmiest days of Mexico, than did the last heiress of their fallen fortunes, but still famous name, demean herself toward her suppliant visitors.

To Julia, indeed, she was now all blandness. Her manner to her was more than kind. It was even sisterly. The Partisan she treated as an old and valued friend, and Gordon as an honored stranger. But no person who beheld her on that evening doing the honors of her house and table, could have suspected for a moment that she was aware of the many sad deficiencies which were but too apparent in the whole *menage*; much less that she felt herself in some sort degraded, as the scion of a ruined house, as the child of a half-conquered country, entertaining the sons and daughters of a wealthier and more fortunate land, the enemies of her race, the subjugators of her people.

There was none of the wild fiery vehemence now in her manner which had been so apparent

on the first entrance of her visitors. If she had not subdued, she had at least controlled her feelings, and if she were but playing a part, she was playing it at least with consummate energy and skill.

General conversation there could, of course, be none between persons who had, save two, never met before, and who had scarce a feeling or a thought in common. They spoke, therefore, of the chances and perils which it had been Julia's lot to run within the last few days; and here Marguerita, although she pretended not to feel aught but detestation for the war itself, contempt for the alleged causes of that war, and bitter, bitter animosity toward all those that waged it, spoke feelingly, and cordially, and generously to her guest.

To some vague words which fell from the lips of Gordon touching the probabilities of an early peace, she replied quickly:

"Never, never, Señor Lieutenant—you know it and I know it—your people never turn an eye or a thought backward, and mine will never yield an inch! You may butcher us all with your terrible artillery—you may sweep us all from the face of God's earth, but you can never conquer us! Who ever yet conquered a Spanish people? What the great captain of the world—the greatest of ten centuries, could not accomplish with his hundreds of thousands in the Old Spain, you with your tens of thousands will fail to do in the new. You may make our cities into heaps of ruins, our plains into charnel houses! may make solitude and call that 'Peace,' but you will never make us slaves. But I am wrong," she added in a minute, "I am very wrong to speak of these things. This is one of those short, happy moments, moments of peace and pleasure called from the midst of war and misery; one of those moments of chivalrous and courteous feeling even between mortal foes, which makes us know and feel that even in all his vices man has something of good and god-like—that even in all its horrors, life, even life in warfare, has something good and noble."

She paused, and filling a cut-glass goblet with fine old wine of Xeres, she raised it to her lips, and barely touching it with them, passed it to Pierre, bowing her head and saying solemnly: "And now in test of my good faith to you and yours, I drink to you, Don Pedro, who first taught me the lessons that even mortal enemies may have courtesy and even Americans show mercy."

The blood rose hot to Gordon's cheek, as she uttered those proud words; but she was a woman and his tongue was tied—his hostess and he was bound to silence. The Partisan, however, bowed his head and drank the wine in silence, but when he had finished the draught, he said, calmly:

"I trust that time, dear lady, will teach us all much that we know not now. Even by such encounters men learn to prize each other as foes worthy of their steel. And it may be even of this cruel war we may be rendered better friends hereafter."

"Cruel war!" she replied, "cruel war, indeed! But I think *you* know not how cruel. It is not only that you conquerors, you foreigners yourselves are cruel to us, but that you make us Mexicans cruel to one another. Know you that for this thing which I have done this night, my life, and my brother's life, and the lives of all our kin are forfeit—nay, but the lives of every servant of my house from the old man of a hundred to the babe that was born yesterday. Such is the proclamation of Carrera, and to the letter will it be enforced against all those who harbor, or protect, or feed, or succor an American!"

"Great God! and have I brought this upon thee, Marguerita?"

"I thank God that you have," she answered; "for thus only can I prove to you that I am indeed grateful."

"No! no! it is impossible," said Gordon. "He may threaten such things, but he dare not perform them."

"And yet," she answered, coldly, "methinks I have heard that such is the law of war, and whether it be or no, it is a just law! Death to the foe who treads, arms in his hands, upon the soil of Mexico, and tenfold death to the traitor who lends him countenance!"

Her beautiful brow was knitted fiercely as she uttered those strong words with fiery vehemence; her eye seemed to flash lightning, and she bit her lip till the blood almost sprung beneath the pressure of her ivory teeth.

The Partisan gazed at her silently for a little space, and sadly; and when he again addressed her, it was in a smothered voice and with a quivering lip.

"And I have brought this doom on thee; and thou art a traitress, Marguerita?"

"A traitress to my country, ay! or to my country's rulers! but to my heart, to my conscience, to my faith, true as the truest patriot! Here, not to be a traitress, were blacker shame than to be a traitor, such as your Arnold."

"And will they indeed enforce such sanguinary edicts?" asked Gordon, eagerly.

"Listen," she answered. "It was scarce one hour before your horses trod the pavement of our court-yard, that more than a hundred

horse went forth, with my own brother at their head, Juan de Alava, and the old hero Padre. Their errand was, first to make prisoners of *you*, who now sit as friends around the table, where they supped at nightfall; and, second, to wreak the vengeance of this law on certain wretches who have supplied your generals with food, and guided your men through our country."

"And had they not done so," said Gordon, gravely, "our generals would have burned their houses, and driven off their herds."

"Even such a thing is war!" said Marguerita; "a war at least of invasion!"

But Julia, who had been listening intently to every word that had passed, now arose calmly to her feet, and said, in a low, determined tone:

"Let us go forth! Let us go forth, if it be to certain death! This doom will not I bring on any house, on any head that protects me! Let us go forth, Partisan, I say! I will not tarry here, let what may come of it!"

But Marguerita sprung up yet more earnestly, and cried:

"Hear me! Hear me! You must tarry now; for if evil be, that evil is already done! For you to fly hence, now, is to make capture certain; and of capture must come discovery, and of discovery—death—crime! The crime—already is committed; already are all our lives forfeit! Add not your destruction to my ruin—or, rather, by your destruction, make not my ruin certain. Speak for me, good Don Pedro; speak for me! My friend, my preserver, speak for me! Am I not right? Do I not speak truly?"

"She does, indeed," replied Pierre mournfully. "I have done much amiss in this, but of Heaven's truth I thought not of it. But when she calls upon me thus, I must reply, she does, indeed, speak truly. Gordon, your wife must tarry here, close-hidden; to move her hence were to destroy both! But we must go hence, instantly! I command here, and I say, instantly, by heaven! Our only hope is to bring force enough to save them both, and I will do it, or my name is not Pierre Delacroix."

"Bring force? what force, Don Pedro?" asked the girl. "An American force, do you mean?"

"I do mean it, Marguerita."

"Then you must swear that they shall neither draw a sword, nor fire a shot, except in self-defense, or in her defense, from the hour when they shall follow you to the rescue until they shall be safe within their lines at Monterey. It is thence that you will bring them up."

"It is! I will swear it!" said the Partisan, coolly.

"You will swear it, upon your honor?"

"As a soldier, and a man, upon my honor!"

"I am content; I will guard her as my sister; as my life! No harm shall come to her, save through my life! You shall find her safe when you return, or you shall find us together!"

"Happen what may, for this God will bless you, Marguerita."

"And will you sometimes think—sometimes pray for me?"

"I will think of you to my dying day—I will pray for you; love—"

"Love!" she exclaimed, again blushing fiery red. "Love me! No, not that never, never can be!"

And, breaking off, without giving him a chance to reply to her, she hastened across the room to the place where Gordon and Julia were conversing earnestly, and she half tearfully together; and, laying her hand lightly on the young wife's shoulder, said to her, tenderly:

"And will you trust yourself, when your friends, and he you love, are gone, with poor Marguerita?"

"As I would with him," she answered, enthusiastically, casting one arm over Gordon's shoulder; and, pointing with the other hand to Pierre, she added: "or with him, and you know how he is to be trusted."

"Thank you, thank you, dear lady," she replied, clasping her in her arms affectionately, and kissing her brow as she might have done a child's. "Your trust shall not be deceived."

Then she turned round to Gordon and continued:

"And will you trust her with me? You—who must love her so tenderly—for whom she has dared and done such beautiful, brave things? Will you leave her in my charge, so young, so beautiful, so tender? You, her young husband?"

"I will—I will," answered the soldier; but his voice faltered, and sounded hoarse and husky as he did so. "I will, as indeed I have no choice; and may God so deal with you as you are true to her or false."

"I false! I false!" she replied, hastily—almost fiercely. "But let that pass. Do you, can you trust her to me, willingly, freely, fearlessly?"

"Not fearlessly; not fearlessly. How could I leave her fearlessly? Freely I do, and willingly, as Heaven hears me! for he has told me of you;" and he pointed to the Partisan; "has pledged his honor for your truth."

"Have you?" she said, looking to Pierre tenderly. "Have you? That was well done. Your honor is safe, Pedro!"

"I know it," he said, gloomily. "I know it, Marguerita. Yet, I think we shall never meet again," he added, in a whisper.

"We shall—we shall meet again!" she exclaimed, almost triumphantly. "If not on earth—there, where there are no wars, and no enemies—where we shall part no more forever!"

"Amen!" replied Pierre. "God grant we may meet both here and hereafter."

There are scenes of mortal sorrow, mortal agony, which no pen save that of inspiration can describe adequately. That which ensued was one of those; and, like the Greek painter of old, we will draw the veil of silence over that which speech cannot portray.

Two hours later, and the horse-tramps of the dragoons had died away in the distance, and Julia had wept herself into forgetfulness of her sorrows on the bosom of Marguerita.

CHAPTER XVI.

JUAN DE ALAVA.

The morning which followed the departure of Pierre Delacroix and his companions from the ruined rancho, dawned as serene and gentle as the waking of a new-born child. The sun was not yet up above the tree-tops, which surrounded, at a short distance, the lowly dwelling-house of Marguerita; but though a soft blue shadow still lay over the deep greenwood and rich barking thickets of the garden, and though the arches of the forest were filled with a thick mist, the cloudless sky above was resplendent with golden luster. The air was vocal with the song of birds, and the soft music of a distant waterfall came gratefully to the ear, blent with the fitful murmur of the breeze among the billowy branches.

Such were the sounds which hailed Julia, as she awoke from her slumbers; and for a little while, as she lay in that half conscious state, which will sometimes intervene between perfect sleep and perfect awakening, accustomed as she had been for weeks to the sounds of the forest, she fancied that she lay in the little tent which had so long been her dwelling—perhaps dreaming that her young husband slept beside her.

Suddenly she stretched out her hand, and feeling that she was alone, started at once from her sleep with a little cry, and sat up in bed, thoroughly aroused. It was a minute or two, however, before she could sufficiently collect her thoughts to be satisfied as to where she was, or how she came thither. It was not merely the bewilderment which often comes upon us, when awakening for the first time in a strange place, unconscious of the change of scene, for here, as she looked around the chamber, her eyes failed to assist her memory.

So short a time had she remained awake on the previous night, when she retired to rest after the departure of her friends, worn out by fatigue and sorrow, that she had in fact scarcely surveyed the room at all; and now she recognized none of its features, although thereto was something half-familiar in it to her senses, as if at some time or other she had seen it in a dream. For in truth it was the very chamber which the Partisan had described to her as that wherein he had first beheld Marguerita de Alava amid the din and desolation of warfare.

Now all was calm, and cool, and silent, except for the soft and pleasant sounds which I have mentioned; yet, in all respects else, the room and its arrangements were unaltered. The massive sculptured bed on which she lay, with the light draperies of gauze festooned in graceful curves around her; the exquisitely-carved crucifix of ebony and ivory in a niche at the bed's head, and in a smaller one, below it, the vase of holy water; the fine old paintings in rich frames upon the walls; the quaint, antiquely-formed chairs and settees; the tables with distorted legs, relics of a past age, all met her eyes as something which she must have seen before, though where, she knew not.

There were books, too, upon the table, and instruments of music, and implements of female industry, and vases of fresh flowers, filling the air with a pleasant perfume, and fifty other things which indicated the habitual presence of a refined and cultivated woman. It must not be supposed that this uncertainty continued long—not so long even as it has taken us to describe it—nor was it altogether an absolute doubt, so much as a vague unconsciousness of reality, which gradually yielded to the powers of memory.

Before she had, however, fully collected herself, a soft voice was heard singing without, in a soft, melancholy tone, the exquisite old Spanish strain, "Rio Verde, Rio Verde," commemorative of the death of brave Alonso de Saavedra in a wild foray with the Moor, which has been rendered into English, scarcely inferior to the original in melody and pathos:

"Gentle river, gentle river,
Lo thy banks are stained with gore, etc."

There was a singular pathos in the accents and expression of the singer, nor is it by any means improbable that the misfortunes of her own land, prostrate in spite of all the efforts of her bravest sons beneath the iron heel of the invader—her own land, every stream of which had

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been well-nigh choked with native carnage, suggested themselves to the singer so forcibly, as to render accents naturally soft and pathetic, plaintive in the extreme, and full of deep melancholy.

A moment afterward the song ceased, the door flew open and Marguerita de Alava entered with her superb black hair tightly braided round her brow, her slender girlish form lightly arrayed in a white linen dress, and her small white feet unslipped. She carried in her hands a little tray with chocolate and sweet-meats, and little rolls of snow-white bread and cool water from the spring; and, as she set them on the table, she turned with a sad smile toward the bed, saying:

"You must pardon me, lady, if I perform these little offices myself and intrude my services upon you, for the fortunes of war have imposed the task of such light labors on me, happier than many of my sisters, who are reduced to utter penury and ruin."

"Pardon me rather, dear Marguerita—for so you must let me call you—that I permit you thus to wait on one who is so far in every way beneath you. Except," she added with a winning smile, "that in all times and countries the character of a suppliant has been invested with a sort of mournful dignity."

"Is it so, lady?—is it so, indeed?" cried Marguerita, half-eagerly, half-sorrowfully. "No! no! I fear me, such things are but the generous coinings of the poet's brain. Who ever heard, who ever felt, ever revered the dignity of a suppliant nation? But no! no!" she continued, in a prouder strain, with her pale cheek kindling as she spoke; "fallen she may be, vanquished, down-trodden, overrun! but Mexico is not, nor never shall be suppliant!"

"Alas!" said Julia, deeply moved by the constant pre-occupation of Marguerita's mind by the thought of her country's sorrow, which became but the more perceptible the longer they were in company. "Alas! that I could console you! but in such cases consolation is insult! and yet I would pray you to believe that there are noble, and just, and wise hearts among my countrymen, who see, who deplore, in this sad war the shame not of Mexico, but of America—who abhor the laurels stained with the blood of weak though desperate valor! I would tell you that even among the soldiery whose swords have hewed the deepest into your steadfast ranks, there are more than a few who distrust the justice of their country's cause, while they maintain their country's honor—who, while they exult in the trained valor of our armies, bear honest testimony to the strong defense, the unflinching valor, the impassive hardihood of yours!"

"You are generous to say so, lady; and why should I not believe you? There are good men, and wise, and brave in all nations, as there are base, and bloodthirsty, and brutal. But, believe me, it is easier to be generous to a down-fallen enemy than to a conquering foe. But come, will you not rise and break your fast?—and then, if you please, we will go out and I will show you what was once a very lovely garden, and now is a very lovely wilderness, and initiate you into the mysteries of our every-day life in Mexico."

"But may I not speak further with you on this subject?" asked Julia, as she arose and proceeded to the ordering of her simple toilet. "It seems to me, that even if such subjects be painful, we get rid of prejudices by conversing on them, and perhaps learn to love each other the better for that we have once been opposed in hostility."

"It may be so, where the foes are evenly matched, and the fight fairly fought. It may be so with the victor's thoughts toward the vanquished. But believe me, the outraged, trampled, beaten victim never can learn to love the hand, though he may fawn on it, which smote him. You may have learned to think better of us, lady, because I have heard tell that you deemed us a poor, barbarous, base, cowardly and cruel people; that you believed our conquest would be bloodless, our subjugation easy and complete. And lo! it has cost you the best blood of your land; and, though beaten at all points, we are not, nor ever shall be subjugated. Extirpate our race, annihilate our blood, abolish our faith and our tongue, you may, perhaps; but in centuries, not years. Subjugate us, you can never! Who ever saw a people subjugated that were resolved to be free?"

"But are you free, Marguerita? I have heard much of the oppression of your military rulers, of the tyranny of your great nobles, of the misery and degradation of your people."

"Dreams, lady!—dreams or falsehoods! Our people have all the freedom they desire, all they are fit for. And, if not, where is the slave who would not rather be a slave under his native lord than a freeman by compulsion of a foreign ruler? No, dearest lady, no. Those cries, those pretexts are the old legend—one and all—the wolf's complaint against the lamb. The plea of the oppressor against the oppressed is ever fraud. And in all ages, from the earliest, strong men have coveted the goods, and preyed upon the substance of the weak, and mighty nations have despised the rights, and devoured the

very existence of small countries; but lady, God has judged them for it, and will judge them forever!"

"We believe this."

"So do we, lady. So do we, also, to men; but not to nations! To nations, there is no hereafter; for nations, there is no world to come. I have heard wise men of my country say, long years ago—ay, I have heard that it was said, years and years ere you or I were born, that for the cruelties of our race, in past time, to the poor Indians—for the atrocities of Cortez, of Pizarro and their Spaniards—God would repay to us vengeance an hundred fold; and lo! the beginning of the payment! Lady, I have lived to see our fields untilled, our houses heaps of ruins, our rivers red with blood, our brothers slaughtered in the field, our sisters outraged in their dwellings! I look to see our cities level with the ground, or worse; yet occupied, inhabited by the invader; our altars desecrated; our priests banished from their shrines; our faith, our language, nay, our God proscribed; and our people, the last remnant of our race, fugitives on the hills, dwellers with the wild goat and wolf, even as the Aztecs were of old! I look to see all this. But is our nation guiltless? I have heard say that your Puritans, your Yankees of New England, hunted your red-men with as keen a sword as our believers; that they burnt whole tribes in the night—exterminated a whole race from the very face of the green earth! I have heard say that your government does so still; that the Indian has no rest, day or night, but still goes westward, westward like the sun, like him to set at last in the western sea! Lady, I have heard tell of whips, and chains, and slavery, in your proud land of freedom! And, for these things, the day shall come when God shall judge you, as he now judges us! May He be merciful in that day to you and yours, as He has in this trial to me and mine; and may He in that day raise up to you and yours a defender and a Savior—I will not say from my people."

"As he has done now—as he has done now!" cried Julia, bursting into a fit of passionate tears, "in you who thus protect me."

"I thought not of that, dear lady."

"Julia! Julia!" she cried, imploringly, "will you not call me Julia? I called you Marguerita, dear, dear Marguerita."

"Julia—dear Julia, then," replied the Spanish girl, soothingly: "believe me, I thought not to wound you, but my heart bleeds, my heart burns when I think of my country and her wrongs. Oh God!" she added, stamping her foot on the marble floor with a strange revulsion of feeling, and clutching her small delicate hand, "Oh, God, that I were a man!"

Julia's flesh quivered as she heard her speak, and she felt that singular sensation of the hair creeping as it were, and bristling on the head, which any sudden rousing of the nobler sentiments at times produces in high and nervous natures, and her throat seemed to rise and swell, and her eyes were filled with tears, though she wept not.

"And what could you do, Marguerita," she said, softly, "if you were a man? What could the bravest man that ever lived do for your country? How can you dream that were you a man you could save her?"

"I could die for her!" answered the other, still full of vehemence and over-wrought feelings, when, at the very instant of her fiery and eloquent speech she started, shivered in every limb, turned paler than the drifted snow, and seemed to be on the point of falling.

"Madre de Dios!" she exclaimed, in a low whisper, "heard you that?"

"Heard I what?" cried Julia, terrified beyond expression at the sudden change of her tone, manner, and countenance; "I hear nothing but the wind, the birds, the waterfall!"

"There—there again!" said the other, standing erect and motionless, with her finger uplifted, her head thrown a little backward, her lips apart, her nostrils dilated, her eyes fixed on vacancy. "There—there it is again—they are coming!"

"In God's name, what do you hear?—who are coming?" almost shrieked Julia, so fearfully were her nerves excited and unstrung.

"That bugle—that Mexican bugle!" answered Marguerita.

At the same moment the long wailing note of a bugle rose faintly in the distance, so faintly that even now it scarcely reached the ears of Julia, although her companion, more accustomed to the sound, had recognized it long before.

Faint as it was, however, poor Julia knew it instantly. It was the same note she heard so often on that awful day when the lancers of Carrera were engaged hand to hand with the Comanches scarcely a gunshot from her hiding place.

"Carrera!" she faltered, almost fainting with excess of terror, "is it not Carrera?"

"It is Carrera's lancers," was the short, stern reply of the Spanish girl, "and that said, all is said. We are lost—they are here!"

She added the last words hastily, for as she paused, the sharp clatter of half a dozen horses entering the court-yard at a gallop, and the

jingling clash of accouterments told as plainly as words that the cavalry were upon them.

An instant afterward the jingling of spurs and the clang of a steel scabbard on the stone pavement of the outer room was heard approaching the door quickly.

Then Marguerita's face lightened for a moment as she sprung to meet the new-comer.

"It's Juan!" she cried, "it is my brother, and thanks be to God, alone!"

"The door flew open, and on the threshold stood the young guerrilla. It was the form of the Antinous, without his effeminacy—it was the head of the conquering Bacchus, without his sensuality. A specimen more perfect of young manhood never walked the earth. His rich golden skin, his clustering black locks, his deep dark eye, his high and massive forehead, composed the very beau-ideal of that type of manly beauty. His broad round chest, thin flank, and shapely limbs, all displayed to the utmost by his magnificent costume, promised a world of agility and power.

His broad-brimmed hat with its long drooping plume cast a yet deeper shadow over the upper part of his face, from which his eyes shone out with a strange radiance, but there was nothing in it fierce or angry. A dark crimson blanket hung carelessly from his right shoulder, half-concealing the green velvet jerkin with its rich embroideries, and the deer-skin pantaloons open below the knee, all slashed and fringed with gold; but all the left side of his person was exposed to the light as he paused on the threshold, and the first sunbeams glittered on the hilt of the long straight sword which hung from his side, on the butts of a pair of heavy pistols and the bright handle of a formidable stiletto in his girdle.

There was wonder in his face, and something that almost resembled awe, as he gazed on the two beautiful young women, but no fierceness or menace.

He was the very image, but cast in a more stately mold, of Marguerita.

His eyes, his features, his expression were all hers, with all her tenderness, her softness—almost, I had said, her girlishness.

Yet, unless rumor lied, and in his case it was never so believed, deeds had been done by that soft, beardless, tender, girlish youth, that would have well entitled him to the fame of a Nero or a Catiline.

"*Madre de Dios!* who is this?"

"Brother! Juan! brother!" exclaimed Marguerita, seizing him in her arms, and striving to embrace him.

"What have you done, mad girl? Who is this, I say, who is this, Marguerita?"

"A suppliant, a fugitive, a friend, a sister, a sister of the Partisan—of Pedro, my brother, Pedro el Salvador!"

"An American," he said slowly, his brow gradually uniting into a black frown, as he uttered the word, and his eye growing lurid with a sort of concentrated fire, then laying his hand on the hilt of his stiletto, he muttered through his set teeth, "She must die!"

"Never! no! for your life! for my soul! for the name of God! for the most holy virgin! no, brother, no! not while I live! He brought her here! He who preserved your life and my honor! He asked me to protect her! and I swore it by my mother's soul! and I now swear it!"

"Fool!" he almost shouted in his rage, as he thrust her aside violently, "Carrera will be here within ten minutes, and all our lives are forfeit by your treason!"

"Better so, than our honor lost!"

But he heeded not her words, but strode forward with a firm determined step toward Julia, who had fallen almost senseless into a long arm chair beside the bed. His dagger was bare; he stood close over her, and she had neither tongue to pray, nor hand to resist.

His arm was raised to strike—the keen blade flashed in the sunlight as it descended—but ere it found its living sheath, another blade, held in as firm a hand, although it was a woman's, crossed it! Sparks flashed from the sharp collision of the steel, and Juan's stiletto flew to the further end of the room, wrenched from his fingers by the sleight of his sister's hand.

And she, with her slight form dilated, and her face full of glorious inspiration, stood before him, menacing, overwhelming him.

"Strike her!" she cried, "kill her! and by the mother of our Lord, the instant that your dagger finds her heart, this shall find mine!" and she shook her own weapon in his face. "This, which I bear to save myself from dishonor, has saved my brother from disgrace!"

"She is saved!" said Alava, gloomily, "but we are lost! or rather we are all lost together! Think you Carrera will spare her for her beauty, or me for—my folly? She is a prisoner; we are traitors! and we shall all die together!"

"Be it so! we will die together: I never knew that you feared to die, my brother! I only fear dishonor!"

"That may precede death," he replied, more gloomily than before. "Carrera's men will make small distinction between a captive American and Mexican traitress.

"You forget, brother, this can save me," said

she again showed the weapon, which she had wielded so boldly, so successfully.

"By your own hand, sister?"

"By yours it were better, Juan!"

"Be it so: we will die together," and as he spoke, he walked deliberately across the room, and picked up his weapon.

"But why die at all?" exclaimed Marguerita, suddenly; "they will not tarry long. We can conceal her. In the niche, you know, in the niche! Sanchez and Estefania and Francisco, need but a hint to make them as mute as statues. We can conceal her, brother, and be saved!"

"He knows that they came hither. We have traced their hoof-tracks to the very gate. A wounded soldier saw them leave their hiding-place, and we met Carrera on their track. I know not how we failed to meet them. Besides, Sanchez has owned that they have been here."

"Has he owned that she is here?"

"No. He never named her."

"Where is he?"

"In arrest."

"And Estefania?"

"In arrest."

"And Francisco?"

"And he likewise."

"Then we are saved."

"How saved?"

"Go! Tell them, you, to swear that the dragoons forced our hospitality by menace, which we could not resist. They were five strong—young men, well armed. What could we do?"

"It may save us—who knows?"

"It will save us! Do it! Away! Every moment is a life!"

Then, as he left the room in haste, she sprung up on the bed, touched a spring in the wall, and the back of the shallow niche in which the crucifix stood flew open, turning outward on a hinge, disclosing a small circular closet, lighted by a small air-hole, and contained a low stone bench, wrought in the wall.

"Up! up!" she exclaimed, shaking Julia sharply by the arm. "Up! and in there or all our lives are forfeit; and, as you live, whatever you may hear or see, stir not, speak not, breathe not, as you prize life and honor!"

And aroused from her prostration by the dreadful emergency, and nerved by the firmness of the Spanish maiden, Julia did rise, pale as a ghost, but calm and firm, and kissed and blessed her hostess, and mounted into the small biding-place, and drew the secret door close after her.

Nearer and nearer came the bugle horn, and then the clang of hoofs, the orders of the officers, the din of the men dismounting, and the clash and clatter of their arms.

Hurriedly, in the meantime, had Marguerita thrust aside the few articles of Julia's clothing which were scattered about the room, but when she thought that all was safe, and the steps of the officers were heard in the outer hall, she sat down quietly to her embroidery, and took up again her mournful song:

Gentle river, gentle river,
Lo! the banks are stained with gore,
and was singing tranquilly and unconcernedly, when her brother again entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XVII.

SPANISH HONOR.

"MARGUERITA, come forth. The General Carrera and his staff request your hospitality."

"It is even too much honor for us to give it," she answered, rising as if entirely unembarrassed; and, throwing her mantilla around her, for she had otherwise arranged herself already, she advanced with a calm step, and dignity of mien into the outer hall, which was now filled by the brilliant group of officers who had followed the general, as was the court-yard by three or four hundred perfectly equipped lancers.

There was a mighty dosing of plumed hats, and bowing to the lovely senorita as she made her appearance in that glittering presence, the only unadorned and simply attired person who stood there. Many and profound were the courtly compliments, the professions of ready service, and the like, in the sonorous old Castilian tongue; and the General-in-chief himself was the foremost in what would, in any other country, have been pronounced mere lip-loyalty and mock-adulation.

"I regret deeply," he said, after a few moments spent in ordinary compliments, "that we were unable to arrive hither a few hours sooner, as our presence would have, I hear, relieved you of unpleasant visitors, of whom we have been in pursuit some days."

"We had unexpected visitors indeed, if not unwelcome," she replied. "But to say the truth, they were not uncivil, and though we had not the power to refuse them what they asked of us, they behaved courteously, and made but a short stay."

"Be sure of that," answered Carrera, twisting his mustache; "they knew that I was at their heels."

"They did not think, I fancy, that your excellency was so near them. They spoke something among themselves of a skirmish they had seen between your lancers and the Indians. They hoped your pursuit of the savages would

have drawn you so far away that you would lose a day or two in time."

"Ah! a trifle, lady; a mere trifle! an affair of half an hour! We drove them at the first charge, and had execution of them for miles. But I rejoice to hear that the Yankees were courteous, and it is generous in you to say so, for I know that you have little cause to love them."

"No Mexican has cause to love them—no Mexican can do aught but hate Americans through life and to death—and I am a Mexican!" she said, fervently and proudly.

And so striking was her air, and so electric her tone, that it spread a contagious spirit through the gentlemen around, which manifested itself at first in a low hum, increasing gradually till it ended in a loud outburst of enthusiastic vivas.

"But you in particular have cause to hate them," said the general, as the shout subsided. "You have suffered much at their hands."

"Much indeed!" she replied, with a deep sigh, looking sadly around her. "But these were not the same."

"They were Americans," said Carrera.

"Those were Texans! volunteers!"

"It is the same; Texans, Americans!—Americans, Texans!—wolves all of them! accursed people!"

And a volley of execrations succeeded from all present. Meantime refreshments were handed around, and apologies offered for the impossibility of providing food at so short a notice for all the men, coupled with a proposal to kill several sheep and oxen in order to feed them at nightfall.

This was, however, courteously declined by the general, on the ground that they could not spare so much time from the pursuit.

"They left you early last night, you say, senorita?" asked Carrera. "At what hour was it, think you?"

"An hour or two past midnight, I think," she replied, simply. "But I am not sure, for they awoke me from my sleep, and in truth I took no note of the time."

"And they had a lady with them?"

"A very young and very beautiful lady!"

"They cannot then travel very fast," said the general: "we shall overtake them before night gentlemen."

"They spoke much of the lady's courage and her horsemanship, saying that she rode as well as the dragoons and was as little weary; and, in truth, she looked neither fatigued nor fearful."

"Ha! is it so, indeed? Then we will get to horse at once! Let the trumpets sound 'boot and saddle' and with many thanks to you, beauteous lady, for your hospitality, we will leave you for the present. If it please fortune, we will halt here on our return, and if we take the dogs, we will shoot them here, at the doors of the house they so brutally destroyed!"

"What, prisoners of war, general?" faltered poor Marguerita.

"Siles, senorita. Death to all spies and traitors!"

He arose from his chair as he spoke, and again bowing, was on the point of leaving the apartment, and the poor girl thought that the crisis was past and the danger over.

When in the very midst of the bustle and hurry of leave-taking, an aid-de-camp rushed in hastily and announced that the riding-horse of the American lady had been found in the stable of the rancho, well groomed, and feeding at a well-filled manger.

"Who groomed him?" asked Carrera, sternly.

"A boy called Francisco."

"Bring him in."

And immediately the shepherd boy was led in between two dismounted lancers with escopetas trailed in their hands.

"How came the lady's horse in the stables?"

"It was tired, lame, who knows?—they left it behind."

"Who bade you groom and feed it?"

"No one. It was too good to lose—American people are cursed people—American horses, excellent."

"This may be truth, Valdez," said Carrera to the officer who had brought in the tidings. "The boy speaks steadily and to the point."

But the aid-de-camp replied by a scarcely perceptible shake of the head, and the general resumed:

"Do you know, sirrah, the penalty denounced against all who comfort or succor the Americans?"

"It is death, senor!"

"And do you wish to die?"

"God forbid, your excellency," stammered the boy.

"Now mark me, if you speak one lie, you shall be shot to death within five minutes. If you speak truth, the republic will reward you. Where is that lady?"

"Who knows?" was the evasive answer; but as he uttered it his eyes wandered to his master's face, as if to consult his eyes before replying further. He met their steadfast gaze, and continued firmly, "she went with the rest."

"How went she?"

"They had a spare dragoon horse with them,

loaded with baggage; they left the baggage, and she rode the horse."

"There was some tracks, general," interposed one of the young officers, "and we know that there are but five men and one woman."

"Well said, Don Joseph. It is all right, I fancy, Valdez. Let them sound horse and away."

"The lady's horse is quite fresh, and sound as a bell. My men are making further searches, general. I pray you for a short delay," said the aid-de-camp.

"Be it so," he answered, sternly. "And bark ye, Valdez," he continued, "let six file prime and load, take this dog down into the courtyard, and if he does not confess within five minutes, shoot him."

The poor boy fell upon his knees and poured out a volley of misericordias, and por el amor de Dios, and every possible form of Spanish supplication—he wept, he wrung his hands, he tore his hair, he called upon his master, his mistress for aid to save him for the love of God! but not an offer did he make to reveal or confess.

A dragoon entered at this moment bearing a lady's side-saddle and bridle, with girths and bangings all complete, and cast them down at the general's feet, and then said, as he saluted:

"We have found a dragoon horse dead—shot within a few hours, general, in the corral, with all his accouterments upon him."

Carrera's cold, hard eye turned silently and sternly on the miserable boy.

"Speak," he said, "or die. Take your choice. Where is the lady?"

"Quien sabe?"

"Away with him."

Two stout dragoons seized him, and despite his cries, his struggles and entreaties, dragged him away as if he had been a mere infant.

There were five minutes' dreadful, deathlike silence. Marguerita stood cold and impassive as a pillar of stone, with her teeth set and her hands clenched. But for the heaving of her bosom and the quivering of her eyelid, she gave no signs of life.

Juan de Alava preserved his soldier's mien and aspect, but his eye wandered wildly.

The next moment the sharp rattle of a volley, succeeded by one death groan rung through the hall, and the thin blue smoke drifted in through the open door and half filled the apartment.

"Fiel hasta la muerte," muttered he between his hard set teeth.

"Bring out the other servants," roared Carrera, furious at being frustrated.

"Give them five minutes, also, to confess; if they speak not, shoot them."

After another short pause an orderly entered and announced that they had fled into the woods.

"Ha! this lies deeper than I thought for, lady," he added, turning to Marguerita; "we must have your presence in an inner chamber. Valdez, call in our major and six captains, a court-martial. Senor de Alava, follow us."

And without more words, he stalked into Marguerita's private chamber, seated himself in her own arm-chair, and ordering his officers to form a half circle round him, proceeded to arraign her as a culprit.

"You know," he said, sternly, but not uncourteously, "you know, senorita, the doom which our laws have pronounced against all traitors who comfort, protect, or harbor an American?"

"Senor, I know it."

"It is?"

"Death!"

"You are very young to die."

"I am young, senor; but when God calls us hence it is never early."

A slight murmur of admiration ran through the circle at her calm and dauntless resolution, but found no echo from the cold lips of Carrera.

"There are things worse than death, senorita."

"But one."

"And that is?"

"Dishonor."

"And do you not fear that?"

"I fear not that which I can never know."

"Others may dishonor you."

"No! one can always die."

"You are bold, lady."

"Confident, senor, because prepared."

"See that you answer what I shall ask you now, truly."

"If at all, truly."

"Where is the lady gone who was here last night?"

"The boy whom you murdered told you that she went with the rest."

"He lied, and lost his life by his lie!"

She bowed her head and was silent.

"On your honor, whither has the lady gone?"

She looked in his face and was silent.

"On your honor, do you know where the lady is at this moment?"

"I do know."

"Where is she?"

"I have sworn to be silent."

"That oath was treason to your country."

"By your proclamation."

The Silent Rifleman.

"You know it? You have read it?"
 "I do—I have."
 "Enough. One question more—will you reveal it?"

"I will not."

"And you know the alternative?"

"Death!"

"And you are prepared to die?—so young, so beautiful, to die a traitress?"

"God will forgive me."

"Mark me, reveal this, and we at once pardon yourself and your household—nay, but your brother, also, who doubtless knows your guilt."

"What would be her fate should I do so?"

"The will of the conqueror—the soldier's pleasure."

"A woman, a lady, and a prisoner of war?"

"I have spoken, lady."

"And I, general."

"Colonel Don Juan de Alava, on your honor, as a soldier and a gentleman, do you know where this American woman now is?"

"I do know."

"Where is she?"

"Do you think me less firm than a woman?"

"Have you sworn secrecy?"

"I have not sworn."

"Speak, I command you."

He was silent. The general cast his eyes sternly round the circle, reading the judgment of each man by his face, as he asked—

"Are they guilty of high treason?"

And each man nodded in silence as the question came to him in turn.

"And your sentence?"

"Death!" replied Valdez, standing up and uncovering, and all the others arose in their order, and bowed in assent.

"General," said Alava, "you said I fought well at Palo Alto, again at Resaca de la Palma—well when I captured Thornton's horse, and well when I saved your life from the Partisan. For these things grant me one boon."

"Name it."

"A soldier's death."

"A traitor's!—kneeling!—shot in the back! are you answered?"

"General," said Marguerita firmly but sadly, "I am a woman, a lady, the daughter of your friend. Two years ago a band of Texans sacked this rancho in cold blood, killed my father, my mother, my two brethren, all our blood save him and me. Me too they would have dishonored and then slain. A man, an American, fought his way in and rescued me. That man came to my house last night and asked me: 'for your life which I gave you, for your honor which I saved you, give me my sister's life and honor.' I gave them. General, before I die, a boon."

"Name it?"

"Her life and liberty."

"Who was the man?"

"Name him not, for your soul," shouted Juan de Alava. But his warning came too late. She had spoken.

"His name is Pedro the Partisan."

"Ten thousand furies! His sister! His!" and as he spoke his olive-colored face turned crimson with rage. "Give her up—give her up this instant, or death, which you seem to laugh at, shall be as nothing to what you shall undergo. No form of outrage, of indignity, of dishonor, but the soldiers shall wreak it upon you; and when you die you shall hail death that it has covered you from shame too deep to be endured. Will you speak?"

"I have spoken."

"Away with her! Cast her to the troopers! Let them do with her as they list!"

"General Carrera, you dare not."

"And, hark ye, drag him out, also, and let him look upon her shame, then shoot him."

"Never!" exclaimed two voices in one cry, and as if by one movement brother and sister drew, and raised on high, a sheathless blade.

"Brother—sister—adieu!" and the blades rose as if to strike—but ere the blow was dealt a calm sweet voice cried "Hold!"

"Hold! I am here!"

And at the words, there in the niche disclosed by the removal of that holiest emblem, the Christian's dying God—there with her golden tresses floating disheveled like a halo of glory round her, with her blue eyes filled with the ineffable luster—the luster of a martyred saint, her innocent, artless features glowing with strange exultation, her lovely lips apart, madonna-like, stood Julia Gordon.

"I am here, man of blood! Spare them! But with me do your pleasure; I am in the hands of my God, now as ever."

"You are in my hands now, my beauty!" exclaimed the savage exultingly—"and shall be in my men's hands in five minutes. Fortunate fellows! Such a pair of you! Valdez, why don't you help the lady to descend? By heaven! you are discourteous."

The aid-de-camp, apt minister of his bloody general's brutality, arose to obey his orders, when, at the first step he took, he stopped short as if thunder-stricken. His face was as pale as ashes, his lips wide apart, his knees shaking under him.

Nor was it wonderful! for as he took that step, one sharp short crack came echoing from with-

out, the well-known death shot of the certain rifle—then pealed a bugle, high and shrill—the terrified alarm!—and then crack! crack! the rolling, rattling, irregular, incessant volley of the most murderous of weapons—the deadly rifle of the West. And then, all in one instant's space, it would seem, the thundering noise of charging horse, the clang of blades, the groans, the shrieks, the awful sounds of horror and of havoc which mark the hand-to-hand encounter!

And high above all other sounds, and high arose the war-cry of the Texans—"Remember the Alamo, the Alamo!" and Gordon's name was mingled with the din, shouted by his dragoons; and the fierce cheer of the Partisan, "Pierre! charge for Pierre and glory!" completed the dismay of the surprised and baffled murderers.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE TEXANS.

As the first din of that surprise fell on the startled ears of the Mexican commander, he sprung to his feet quickly and, to say only what he merits, performed his duty as a soldier gallantly, however he had behaved himself as a man and a gentleman.

"We are surprised!" he said coolly enough, drawing his sword; "this is the doings of these traitors—but of that hereafter; to your posts, gentlemen! This can be but an insolent attack of a handful of marauders, whom we will beat back in a moment. There is no regular force within thirty leagues of us. To your posts, I say away!" and he rushed instantly into the hall, which had been vacated already by the subalterns, who remained in it when their superiors had convened themselves to form the court-martial.

All his officers followed his example; unsheathing their swords, and dashing forward gallantly to find their men, and lead them to the charge—all save one, Valdez, for, as is oftentimes the case, the cruel and cold-blooded savage was the dastard also.

He drew himself up, it is true, and set on his plumed hat at the correct angle, and unsheathed his weapon, but he made not one step toward the door, nor even offered to follow his comrades.

"And why does the gallant Colonel Valdez loiter in the rear, when his men are in action?" asked Juan de Alava, sneeringly.

"I might retort the question, sirrah, were it becoming me to reply to a prisoner and a traitor."

"And did you so retort, sirrah, answered Alava quietly, "I might reply that a prisoner has no right to be in action, did it become me to reply to a liar and a dastard!"

"This to me?" exclaimed Valdez. "It shall be answered when your friends, the Yankees, are driven off."

"Ay! this to you!" replied Juan. "This and more also! and it shall be answered sooner!" and he too unsheathed his rapier, for he had not been disarmed, owing to the suddenness with which he had been implicated in the alleged crime of his sister, and to the irregularity of his arrest.

"Walk into the hall, Colonel Valdez, and there I will answer you, if I do soil an honorable blade with the blood of a coward!"

"You have the advantage of me! You are armed with knife and pistols, as well as with your sword! Besides you are a prisoner, and not my equal!"

"The gods be thanked therefor! Now mark me! Before these ladies whom you have insulted, would have outraged, I strike you thus! I spurn you with my foot thus, and thus!" and as he spoke he suited the action to the word, giving him a severe blow with the flat of his sword across the shoulders, and actually kicking him twice with his foot.

"Now will you leave the presence of these women, to which, coward-like, you cling for protection, or shall I shoot you like a dog, before 'heir faces?' and with the words, he laid his hand with an ominous gesture on the butt of one of his heavy pistols.

"No! no! not here, for God's sake! Oh! not here! not here!" shrieked Julia Gordon.

"Drag out the dog by the neck, and shoot him like a dog, without!" cried Marguerita, sternly: for her Spanish blood was up, and kindled by the insults she had undergone; and her heart was unsexed and merciless.

And Juan de Alava did step forward, as if to execute her orders, when, driven to extremity, the dastard turned to bay and delivered a fierce thrust at him with his rapier, but it was parried, and returned on the instant. Both men were in the prime of life, young, active, sinewy, and skillful to a wonder in the use of their weapons. Well matched in height and reach, had their spirit been as equally matched as their strength and stature, it would have been a combat worthy of a Roman amphitheater. As it was, if Juan was as brave as his own steel, and Valdez a base coward, the last was still a coward forced to fight for his life, and such, proverbially, are dangerous.

Their weapons were the deadliest on earth—the long, straight, two-edged sword, fitted alike to cut and thrust, and the strong, bayonet-

bladed stiletto. Cut followed cut, thrust thrust in quick succession; so quick that the dazzled eyes of the spectators could not pursue their course, nor note which took effect, or which were surely parried.

Julia sunk down on the bed and covered her face with her hands, unable to look steadily upon a sight so terrible, but Marguerita stood by, with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye, and her ruby lips apart, showing the pearly teeth; hard set below them, and her soft brow panting with the fierce excitement. And ever and anon, as Juan pressed Valdez hard, and backed him, foot by foot, out of the chamber into the stone-paved hall, she followed them, and clapped her hands at every home thrust which he sent almost to his heart, crying from time to time:

"Kill him! Kill him! Hermano mio! For my sake, kill him! By no hand but yours must the villain die!"

Still they fought on, desperate and determined. Sparks flashed from the collision of their blades; the sweat fell from their brows like rain. Their breath was drawn hard, and loud, and painful; yet neither faltered; this fighting for life and that for vengeance.

And still, without, the sharp, continuous crackling of the Texan rifles was blended with the heavy platooning of the Mexican escopetas, and all the fearful uproar of a well-balanced battle thundered and reeled, now nearer and now further for victory, for the moment, inclined to this side or that.

It was clear that the Mexicans outnumbered their assailants by vast odds; but still the superior energy and strength, and the unerring aim of the Americans outbalanced this advantage; and, by the rapid cracks of the rifle, now overpowering fast the fuller and more ringing reports of the carbines, it was seen that the Rangers must in the end prevail.

Still there was much to be dreaded by the women, and by Julia it was dreaded; for she knew that the Mexicans still fought between herself and her friends, and she felt certain that should they be driven in, defeated, they would attempt to make a last stand in the house, and would again obtain possession of her person.

So strong did this apprehension grow up in her mind, as she heard the tide of fight surging gradually nearer and nearer, that she overcame by a mighty effort her repugnance to look upon the deadly strife that was waging close beside her, and sprung to her feet, calling Marguerita to assist her in opening the casement, and so escaping into the garden, where, as yet, all was still and peaceful.

But the Spanish girl was entranced, heart and soul—she was wrapped up in that dreadful, protracted struggle; and still, fearlessly, she pressed up nearer to the combatants, and Julia could perceive that she held the keen two-edged dagger which had so short a time before saved her life, and almost feared that she would herself strike Valdez. And still she cried. "Kill him, brother, for my sake! Kill him! Kill him!"

Hopeless of directing her from her appalling object, Julia turned, sick at heart, toward the window—the same window which had given entrance to the Partisan, when he arrived but in time to save Marguerita—and at the very moment she did so it was driven inward with a loud crash, and she was clasped in the arms of Arthur Gordon. The sound of his forceful entrance, the clanking steps of his men, for the three dragoons were at his heels, and the clatter of his accouterments, had well-nigh proved fatal to Alava; for at the sudden uproar in his rear he turned his head quickly, and was admonished by a sharp wound in his side of his imprudence.

"Friends! they are friends!" cried Marguerita, whose quick eye instantly discovered who were the intruders. "Now kill him! kill him! or they will take him to their mercy!"

And, like a wounded lion, Juan de Alava charged him home so fiercely that he had not a second's breathing time. Three triple feints, each followed by a home lunge, Valdez had parried in succession, when he lunged in return. His foot slipped a little on the marble floor; his blade was struck aside by Alava's dagger, at the same instant in which his chest was pierced and his heart cleaved asunder by his home-driven blade.

Then Marguerita drew a long, deep breath—it was almost a sigh—and said, in a low, lip-ping tone:

"Else had I slain him with a woman's hand and a woman's weapon!"

Scarce was that fearful death-struggle completed when two of the dragoons advanced their carbines and called on Juan to yield him on good quarters. By the fierce eye and resolved aspect of the young guerrilla, it was clear that had his means of resistance been equal to his will he would have still resisted—resisted the enemies of his country as sternly as he had avenged his own private grievance fiercely; but he had lost much blood, and staggered sickly, and would have fallen but for the sword on which he leaned.

"Where is your officer?" he asked in Spanish. "I am a gentleman, and will not yield but to an officer."

"I am an officer," cried Gordon, springing forward, having learned by one word from Julia who he was. "I am your friend, too. Señor Don Juan—your friend forever."

"He is her husband," whispered Marguerita, "whom you have saved and avenged."

"Give me your sword, quick! quick!" cried Arthur Gordon, springing forward with the speed of light as he saw the Spanish soldiery driven back into the room in confusion before the desperate charge of McCulloch's rangers. "Give them one shot, my lads! make sure each of his man, and then bring off the wounded officer and the lady."

"I can walk! I can walk!" exclaimed Marguerita, who was as self-collected as a warrior in the fray. "Look you, señor, to Julia, and let them bring off Juan."

The carbines of the regulars, discharged at a short range and with deliberate aim, told fatally. Three men went down, wounded or slain outright; and seeing the well known uniforms of the American dragoons, they fancied they were surrounded, and, panic-stricken, rushed back from three men to face a hundred.

Turning about, as coolly as if on parade, two of the men lifted Alava from the ground to which he had fallen, fainting from loss of blood, and carried him off in his own crimson blanket the sergeant deliberately halting in the rear alone to reload his carbine.

Gordon raised Julia in his arms, while Marguerita ran quickly by his side, and in an instant they were all in the beautiful though long neglected garden of the rancho.

"This way! this way!" she cried. "I will guide you. There is an arbor here, in the thicket of oranges, beside the stream, where they will never find us if they search for a twelvemonth."

"Their hands are too full to let them think of us, lady," said Gordon. "The only danger is from stragglers. Ah! true, it is a secret spot. You will be safe here. So, lay him down there, softly, softly, on the grass. See, Julia, if you cannot staunch that bleeding. I'll have a surgeon here in five minutes. Now, Davis, load your arms."

"I am loaded, lieutenant."

"The devil you are! Then let your fellows load, and do not move hence for your lives! Look to the ladies. I will return directly. Fear nothing, Julia. God be with you."

And he turned on his heel, and was out of sight in an instant. He had not taken twenty steps, however, toward the house, before he met a dozen Mexicans rushing out from the window by which his party had escaped; but they broke as soon as they saw him, scattered and fled in all directions, most of them having already thrown away their weapons. They were scarce out of sight, when round the left wing of the building, driving a panic-stricken mass of fugitives before him, with his horse, his sword, his own person, dyed with carnage, the Partisan wheeled at full gallop.

"Pierre! Pierre! charge, lads! for Pierre and glory!" and the response from behind was, "The Alamo! Texas! remember the Alamo!"

And hard at his heels charged McCulloch and Gillespie, and all their daring rangers.

But utterly dispirited and broken, the Mexicans rushed in a body to the same window, by which their comrades were pouring out; and, the two currents meeting, jostled and reeled together like tides conflicting in a narrow channel.

But the terror and numbers of those without were the greater; and gradually they forced their way inward, actually using their weapons, one against the other, in the madness of their despair. And still on the rear of that confused and weltering rout raged the fierce broad-swords of the Texan riders.

"Ha! Mason," exclaimed Gordon, as the rangers swept past him in their charge, recognizing a young officer of his acquaintance. "This work is over now. For God's sake send one of your fellows for a surgeon. A friend of mine lies badly wounded, yonder, in the orange thicket, by the stream."

"Ay! ay!" cried he whom he addressed, rearing up his horse. "You Grayson, gallop to the rear, and bring up surgeon Maxwell."

"Yes, sir," answered the man, reluctantly enough, "when I've had one more crack at the rascals."

"No, sirrah—now!"

But his words were anticipated; for the man had risen in his stirrups and discharged his rifle with fatal execution; and now, as he reeled it and saluted, he replied, civilly:

"Now, sir!" and, giving his horse the spur, dashed away to the rear at the gallop.

"Of course, your lady is safe, Gordon?"

"Or I should not be here! But I wish you would send a dozen men down yonder to that thicket, to mount guard over her. She is almost alone."

"I'll go myself," answered Mason, "or the devil a soul will I get to stir, so long as they can shoot or stick a Mexican! Halt! dress!—halt! halt! or, by the Lord, I'll skewer some of you! That is it. Now steady! steady! Gordon, I'll see to that—never fear. But I wish you would

gallop down, and stop this firing. All resistance is at an end, and it is now mere butchery!"

"I will! I will!" replied the young dragoon; "there has, indeed, been enough of it."

And putting his spurs to a charger, which he caught as it ran by him masterless, he galloped forward, shouting to the men to cease firing. But eager as he was to check the carnage, he was preceded in the work of charity by the bold Partisan, whom he could see mounted among the crowd of dismounted rangers, close to the often-mentioned window, actually cutting at his own men with his broadsword to enforce obedience, and shouting till he was hoarse in Spanish and English alternately:

"Cease firing, and give quarter!"

Suddenly a shot flashed from a loop above, and he reeled in his stirrups and fell headlong.

A fierce roar followed from the soldiery; and, in an instant they forced their way bodily into the building, and wo to the Mexican whom they met when the word was given—"Pierre!"

"My God! they have murdered bim!" cried Gordon; and, forgetful of all else he drove madly to the spot where he lay, sprung from his horse and raised him from the bloody greensward.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SOLDIER'S DEATH-BED.

"THEY have done for me, at last!" cried the gallant soldier, as Gordon raised his head upon his lap, as he knelt behind him.

"I trust not, indeed."

"They have. I am a dead man, Gordon! See! they shot me here, through the right breast, just above the collar-bone, and the ball has gone clean through me—my vitals are cut all to pieces!"

"Great God! is it possible?"

"It is certain! But I thank God! I died in my duty—I died striving to do good! But I forgot, I forgot; is your wife safe?"

"She is, my friend—my more than friend; my preserver."

"And Marguerita?"

"Safe too, and has proved herself a heroine."

"Then I die happy. That firing has ceased, has it not? They have given them quarter?"

"They have! they have! vex not yourself about such matters. They are bringing down the prisoners."

"You will bear witness for me, when I am gone, that I strove to check the butchery."

"And that they murdered you while doing so. Know you who fired that traitor shot?"

"I do know, Gordon, but I will not tell you; for I see that in your eye which tells me he would dearly rue it."

"He should die for it, if he were my brother!"

"Therefore, I will not tell you; there is blood enough on my soul already. Too much of this Mexican blood. But where is your wife, Gordon, where is Marguerita? I would fain see them, once more, ere I die."

"For God's sake! speak not thus, Partisan! You are strong yet—your voice is unchanged—your eye clear. We will have you patched up in a twinkling, and in a week you will be in your saddle."

"Never again! never again!" he answered, quietly. "I have seen too many death-shots; have fired too many—not to know that this is fatal. All the surgeons in America cannot keep me alive an hour. In my extremities I am dead already."

"Are you in pain, Pierre?"

"Can one receive such a wound," he answered, "and not be in pain? My back-bone is cut in two," and a short spasm twitched the muscles of his face, as he spoke, and showed the extremity of the anguish which he endured. "But I can bear pain," he added, and his voice was waxing weaker, already, "like a—"

"Hero!" Gordon interrupted him.

"No!" said the Partisan, firmly, "I hope, like a Christian! But come, my time is short; have me borne to the ladies—useless! useless!" he added, "you fear to let them see me."

"You are right! Maxwell is there, tending the hurt of young Alava."

"Is he hurt? not badly—not fatally, I hope! Our men have shed too much blood here, of the Alavas!"

"They have shed none to-day, but saved! His is a mere flesh wound, given him by a coward of his own race, one Valdez, who outraged his sister."

"Great God! you do not mean—" cried the Partisan, half-starting up, so that the blood gushed from his wound in torrents, at the exertion—"that—that they harmed a hair of her head, or of Julia's."

"Not one, to God be the praise! we came just in time—but just in time, to save them from the last extremity women can undergo."

"All praise be to God, indeed."

Hitherto they had conversed alone, with no witness but the beautiful brown horse of the Partisan, which, bleeding himself from many wounds, stood close beside them, not having moved a yard since the fatal shot was fired, gazing upon his fallen master with an eye that seemed full of human intelligence and sympathy. But at this moment some of the men be-

gan to draw near, in groups, and to the foremost of these, Gordon called eagerly:

"Come hither, some of you, my lads, and bring a blanket—we have a friend here, wounded."

"My own blanket," answered the Partisan. "It is upon brown Emperor's saddle. Where is brown Emperor? He is not hurt, Gordon?"

"No, no! He is close beside you. He has never stirred since that villain shot you."

"He knows that I am dying. He once brought me help, when I broke my leg in the prairies, from ten leagues' distance. Soh! Emperor, good horse! Soh! Emperor!" he added, raising his head a little to gaze on his favorite.

And the beautiful brown horse whinnied as he heard the long-loved voice, and advanced a yard or two, and rubbed his muzzle gentle and fondly over the face of his dying master.

"Good horse! good Emperor!" said the Partisan, patting the face of his favorite horse with his failing hand. "I never shall back you again, good Emperor! He is yours, Gordon, when I am gone. You will be kind to him, I know."

The young dragoon wrung the hand of the dying man hard, and the big tears burst in volumes from his eyes, and fell down like rain upon the face of the veteran.

"Pshaw! Gordon—pshaw! my friend, this is unmanly. We must all come to this. Now raise me up and bear me to the ladies; I would fain speak with them, and I have but brief time."

He was raised from the ground forthwith and laid in his own blanket, and borne as tenderly as possible by the sympathizing soldiers, whose stern faces displayed symptoms of most unwilling sorrow, toward the little bower where Julia and the Spanish maiden were awaiting anxiously the return of their friends.

Still two or three deep groans testified the extremity of anguish which he endured, proceeding as they did from one so firm and fearless.

Yet even in that extremity of suffering, he had his wonted care and forethought for the feelings of others.

"Go forward," he said, faintly; "go forward, Gordon, and apprise them. Women are tender plants, and this, I think, will shock them."

"Shock them!" cried Gordon; "it will bow them to the very earth. One of them it will almost kill, if I know aught of woman's nature."

"Marguerita?"

"Poor Marguerita!"

"Ay, poor, poor Marguerita!" said the dying man, slowly. "It was most strange—it was madness—yet it was not my fault, Gordon."

"Your fault!" exclaimed the other, not even guessing what he could mean.

The dying man understood the expression of his face, and hastened to explain.

"It was not my fault, I mean, that she—that she fancied—that she loved me! I did not trifle with her feelings—you do not believe that I trifled with her?"

"I would as soon believe that a zealot could trifle with his God."

"Go on! go on!" answered the Partisan, pressing his hand kindly, "for this will soon be over. Slowly, slowly, men—bear me slowly!"

And slowly they did bear him, with the beautiful brown horse following them step by step with his head bent almost to the dust, and trailing his long thin mane on the ground, in the depth of animal sorrow.

When Gordon reached the bower the surgeon was fastening up his case, having dressed young Alava's wound, and was on the point of going to offer his services, he said, where they might be more seriously required.

The young soldier caught his last words as he entered, and arresting him by the arm, said earnestly in a low voice, even before he replied to the congratulations of the women:

"That is here, Maxwell; nowhere can they be more required than they will be here. God send that they may avail."

Though uttered in a whisper, Julia heard his words, and judging from the expression of his face, clasped her hands, and cried earnestly:

"Not the Partisan, Arthur—oh! say it is not the Partisan?"

"Would that I could!"

"Not severely—not fatally, at least?"

"I fear mortally."

"My God! my God!" and she burst into a paroxysm of almost hysterical weeping.

The conversation had all passed in the English tongue, yet, as it were, instinctively, Marguerita caught their meaning.

"Don Pedro?" she cried in a low, husky voice, "Don Pedro muerte?"

"No! no!" cried Gordon, eagerly, "not so bad as that, dear lady—only wounded."

"Mortally wounded?"

Almost was he about to answer in the negative, but when he saw the anguish depicted in her face, he could not deceive her, and he replied simply:

"I hope not."

"You hope not—that means he is!"

And she stood pale and rigid, as if struck with catalepsy. Nor did she take the least note of anything that passed around her, until the Partisan was borne in and laid down near her feet on the greensward. Then she riveted her

The Silent Rifleman.

eyes on his ashy face and wrung her hands in mute agony, but spoke not.

"This is a sad sight, dear lady, for a lady's bower," said the Partisan; "but I wished much to see you, and you will pardon much in a dying man, will you not?"

"Pardon! say only what I can do for you!"

"First let me see him," said Maxwell, coming forward; "it may not be so bad as we think for."

"No, doctor, I am past your aid."

The surgeon, who had examined his wound rapidly, pressed his hand and arose without speaking.

"It is so—is it not, Maxwell?"

"It is, Pierre—I will not deceive you."

"I knew you would not."

"How long, Maxwell?"

"Not long."

"An hour?"

The surgeon shook his head mournfully.

Then Marguerita sprung forward, and caught the surgeon by the arm, and cried:

"Muerte! muerte?" in a low, hoarse voice, choked with anguish.

The young man was moved so deeply that his voice was positively choked by his rising tears, and he could only answer by a movement of the head.

She uttered one long piercing shriek, and fell lifeless to all appearance.

The surgeon and Julia hastened to raise her up, but Pierre said quietly:

"Let her be—let her be if there is no danger. It is better she should be senseless until all is over."

"There is no danger," said Maxwell, with an air of wonder.

"God bless you, then, good Maxwell; betake you where you may do more good—my days are numbered. Commend me to McCulloch and Gillespie. My rifle to the first, my pistols to the latter, and this, doctor," he added, as he handed him his knife. "Yourself, Gordon, will keep my horse. Bury me in my blanket with my sword by my side. Fare you well! Now, lady," he added, turning his eyes to Julia Gordon, "in your ear! You will permit me, Gordon?"

"Surely—most surely!"

Then Julia knelt down by his side and clasped his cold hand in her own, and listened with her whole soul in her ears, watering his face with her tears.

"That poor thing," he said, turning his eyes toward the motionless form of Marguerita, "you will be kind to her—you will care for her—you will love her!"

"As my own sister," faltered Julia through her sobs, "as my own sister."

"God bless you—you have read her secret. I never read it until yesterday, nor dreamed of it. It is most strange. But it is better thus—it is better thus! You have read her secret, Julia Gordon?"

Julia assented with a silent nod, and the dying soldier paused for a moment, and appeared to hesitate. Then he drew her down a little nearer to him, and whispered even lower than before:

"And mine also."

Julia flushed crimson through her tears and was silent.

"That I could not love her because—I loved another?"

For a moment she averted her eyes, but the next she met his gaze calmly knowing that he was dying, and answered:

"I did read it."

"But purely, honorably, chastely, as one might love a picture or—a god."

"I knew it."

"Then, indeed, it is best thus, and I die happy. Gordon," he added, raising his head a little for the last time, "this agony is well nigh over! She has promised to be a sister to poor Marguerita; will you do likewise?"

"She shall be my sister."

"God's blessing on you now, friends! I am going, fare-you-well. Weep not for me, for I have lived happily, and I hope not altogether uselessly, and I die happily, for I die with my duty done, in the arms of those I love the most dearly and in the faith of a Christian."

Then he closed his eyes quite exhausted with his efforts, and lay for a long time speechless so that they believed him almost dead.

But he opened them again after a while, and said, very faintly:

"Brown Emperor; good horse. You will be good to him, Gordon?"

Then one of those strange things occurred which at times almost make us think that brutes have souls and reason. For, before the young soldier could reply, the brown horse, which had followed the bearers of his master to the entrance of the arbor, and paused there, as if conscious that he must not enter, no sooner heard his own name uttered in those feeble accents, than he thrust his head through the foliage and uttered a long, low plaintive neigh, utterly unlike any sound he had ever before been heard to utter.

"Ah! thou art there, old friend. God bless thee, too, if it be no sin so to pray. Thou wilt be cared for; will he not, Gordon?—Julia?"

But neither could reply for sobbing. He under-

stood the reason, and said once again, "Bless you all—may God Almighty bless you. Remember that I die a Chris—a Christian! I am going! Gordon, Gordon, let her—let her kiss—kiss me, Julia."

"Kiss him, quick; kiss him, kiss him, Julia."

She knelt beside him, bent her beautiful form over his bosom, and pressed her cold lips to his, and the pure spirit of the noble and high-minded soldier passed away in that last—that first embrace of the woman he had loved so chastely, so devotedly, so nobly.

Happy who so die, in the arms of love, religion, honor.

More words are almost needless. Julia and Gordon, under the guidance of the gallant rangers, reached the lines at Monterey in safety. Long did they mourn over that true and noble friend, who, though the friend but of a day, had stamped himself on their souls forever. But grief, however deep, must have its term, its consolation, and theirs was consoled by happy love and honor, won by high deeds.

Poor Marguerita never ceased to weep for the man she loved so madly and so vainly, till, in the convent which she entered within a month of his death, her sorrows and her sufferings were ended by the boon, which, as the ancients said, God grants to whom he loves—an early death.

"Peace to her hapless love and virgin grave."

Him they laid where he fell, with all the pomp of war and all the grief of nature; but he heard not the rattling volley, nor felt the trickling tears, nor haply would have prized them had he done so, whose highest joy in death, as it had been his best comfort in his wild, yet simple life, was that he died a Christian.

One thing alone remains to be recorded. The brown horse which had followed his master's body to the grave, and watched his interment with an almost human eye, was forced almost by violence from the spot when the last ceremony was ended.

But in the afternoon when the column was formed to march, and the bugles sounded the advance, he reared furiously, broke the leading rein by which a dragoon was guiding him, and galloped to the spot where they had laid his master.

They followed him, and found him lying on the grave, rooting up the fresh laid sods with his muzzle. But when he saw them drawing near, he rose to his feet with a weak, staggering action, stood for a moment gazing at them proudly, then uttered the same long, shrill, plaintive neigh, and in the sound expired.

They scooped a little hollow—it was no sacrifice—beside the grave of him whom he had borne so truly, whom he would not survive, and laid him by those honored ashes, with this motto rudely carved on a low headstone close by the simple monument, which love erected to the memory of the gallant Partisan.

FIEL HASTA LA MUERTE.

MARGUERITA.

They sleep together. Never was better horse or nobler rider.

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